BBC

ADVICE FROM OUR EXPERTS

CUTTING BACK
Monty's advice on what to prune now

TIME FOR A TIDY
Frances keeps the garden shipshape

DESIGN KNOW-HOW
Structure and style tips from **Nick**'s garden

November 2025

GARDENING MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

Gardeners' World

Get set for Christmas

- ✓ Stylish seasonal makes
- ✓ **Adam**'s homegrown yuletide treats
- ✓ **Carol**'s favourite festive shrubs
- ✓ Gardening gifts for family and friends

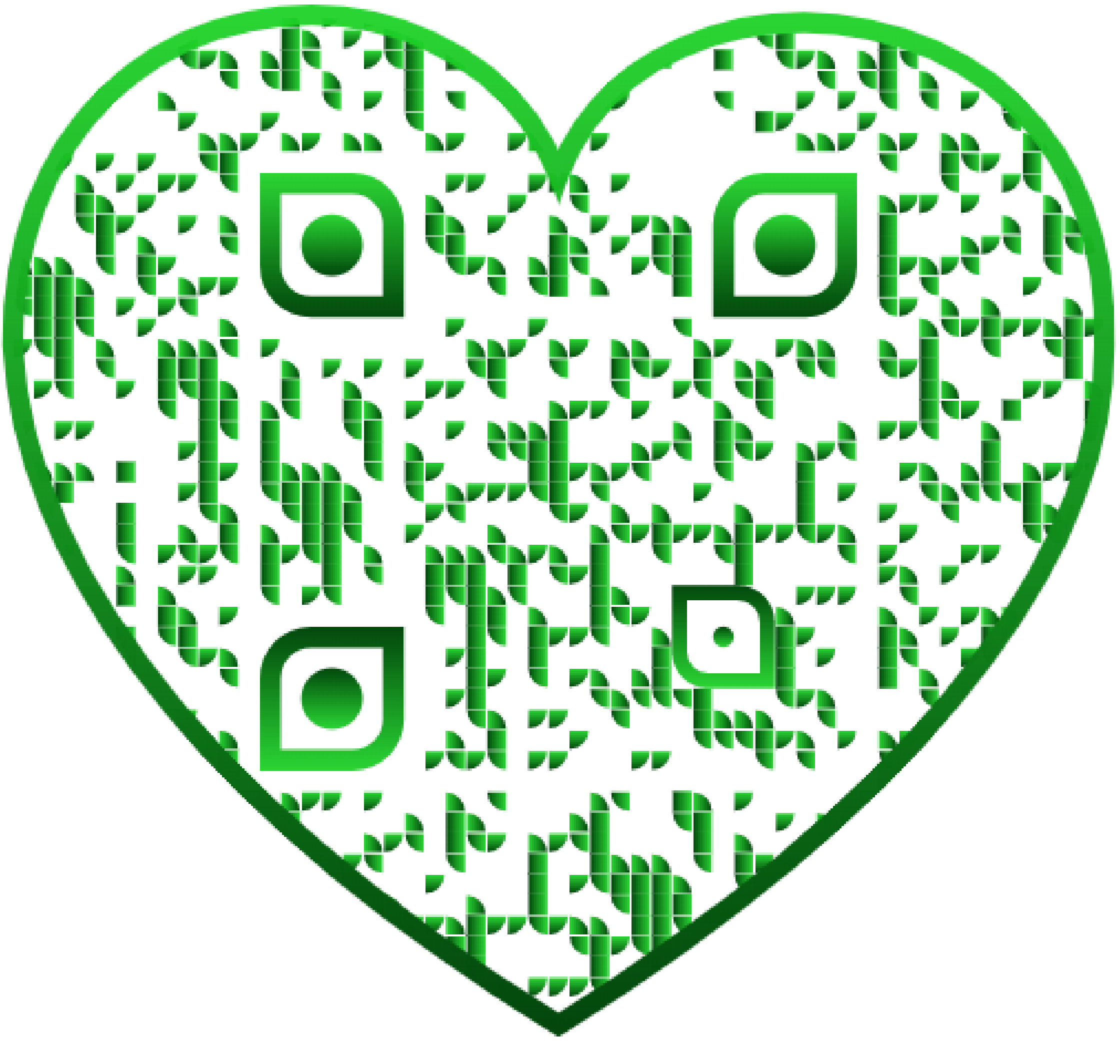
WHAT TO DO NOW
50

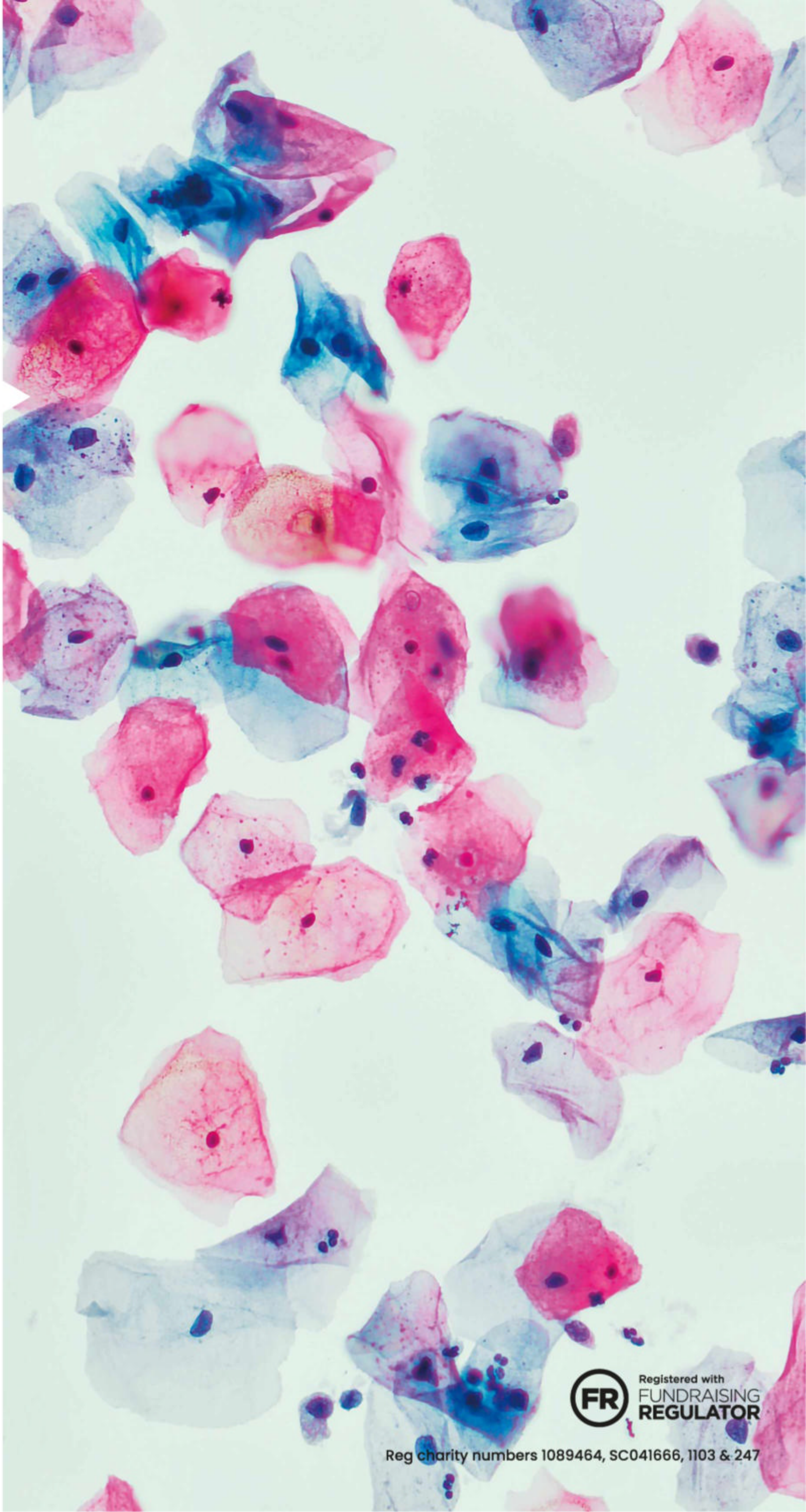
14 pages of essential timely tasks

- ✓ **Plant** shrubs
- ✓ **Trim** bamboo
- ✓ **Add** cyclamen
- ✓ **Harvest** kale

PLUS

✶ **Winter harvest** ✶ **Future-proof plants**
✶ **Euonymus: the expert's pick** ✶ **What next for historic gardens?**





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Welcome to November

This is the time of year, when the leaves are almost gone and autumn is coming to an end, that I start keeping a look out for anything I can forage for the willow ring that's in the shed ready to become our Christmas wreath. Whether I'm in my garden or someone else's, or out walking the dog, I'm up for any seedhead, sturdy flower or evergreen leaf that grabs my attention and I've learnt to keep my trusty secateurs in my pocket when I leave the house so I don't miss anything. I usually end up with a large bucket of stems and branches that sits by the back door until I find the time to weave them into something passable to hang up, but although I love the whole journey of making our wreath, I've never had the imagination to make much else with what's left.

Thankfully, in this month's magazine we're getting ahead of the festivities and turning our attention to all things Christmassy, which means there's inspiration and tips on making not just the beautiful wreath on our front cover, but also napkin rings, table decorations and more – plenty of ways for me to use up my excess foraged materials! See the Christmas section starting on page 51.

But evergreens aren't just handy for Christmas decorations, they're also a vital part of the garden, giving colour, texture and joy during the quieter months. While I have an often-mocked passion for the much-underrated *Cotoneaster horizontalis* (great autumn colour, with berries that stay on the plant long into winter and all on herringbone patterned branches), on page 52 plantswoman Carol Klein has picked out her favourite evergreens for celebrating the season and adding festive colour to our beds and borders.

And if you're in need of further inspiration, then our 2026 calendar, with 12 beautiful gardens from our annual Gardens of the Year competition, should give you plenty of ideas for the gardening year ahead.

Kay

Kay Maguire, Editor

PS... For even more seasonal makes and festive inspiration, check out the *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine* social media accounts, below

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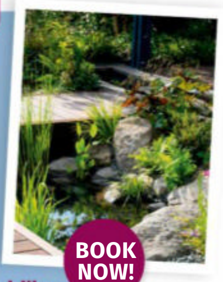

... ahead for a great day out in 2026. Tickets for the **BBC Gardeners' World Spring Fair**, 1-3 May (Beaulieu, Hampshire), and **BBC Gardeners' World Live**, 18-21 June (NEC Birmingham), are now on sale! Visit **bbcgardenersworldlive.com/events** for info and to book (quote GWR1 for discounted reader tickets*).

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Winter

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EDITOR'S PORTRAIT: JASON INGRAM

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Here at *GW*, our goal is simple: to provide expert, trusted advice and inspiration to gardeners – whenever and wherever they need us. Through all of this, we're rooted in a set of core values that are at the heart of all we do:

✔ **Dependable advice** We equip everyone to get the very best from their plants and gardens. Our in-house gardening experts are trained to the highest standard and always deliver dependable know-how, making *GW* the go-to place for practical advice.

✔ **Top gardening names** We work with the best gardening writers and content creators in the business, including *Gardeners' World* TV presenters and other high-profile names. Our content is world-class, with quality, impartiality and accuracy at its core.

✔ **Every space counts** We understand that gardens come in all shapes and sizes, from indoor windowsills and balconies to country plots and community spaces. Our content is inclusive, and we recognise that everyone can garden regardless of their ability, space, available time or budget.

✔ **Homegrown & healthy** We champion the health benefits of gardening. Whether it's growing veggies with the kids to encourage healthy eating, or getting outdoors to aid mental health, we recognise and celebrate how good gardening is for us.

✔ **Beyond the plot** We help the nation's gardeners engage with their passion in all areas of life – think live events (big and small), travel inspiration and a podcast for the commute. We're on hand for gardeners whenever they need us.

✔ **Planet first** Above all, we put the interests of the planet at the heart of everything we do, from caring for garden wildlife and encouraging environment-friendly techniques to working in the most sustainable ways possible. And we understand that gardeners care deeply about the climate crisis.

Thank you for being part of our *GW* family – it means a lot to have you on board. And however you enjoy *GW*, happy gardening!

Kevin Smith,
Content Director
@kevinsmithgarden

Kevin

Meet your *GW* team

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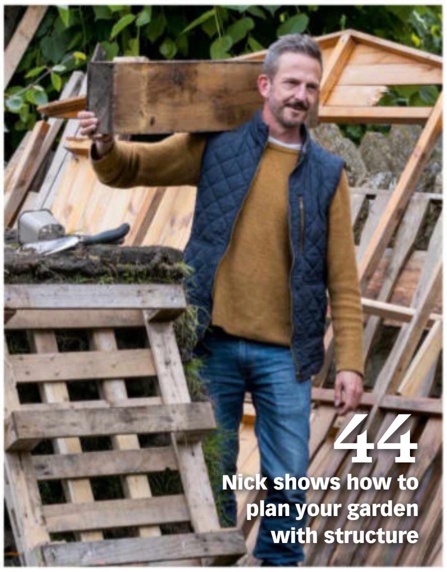
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Your 14-page November planner

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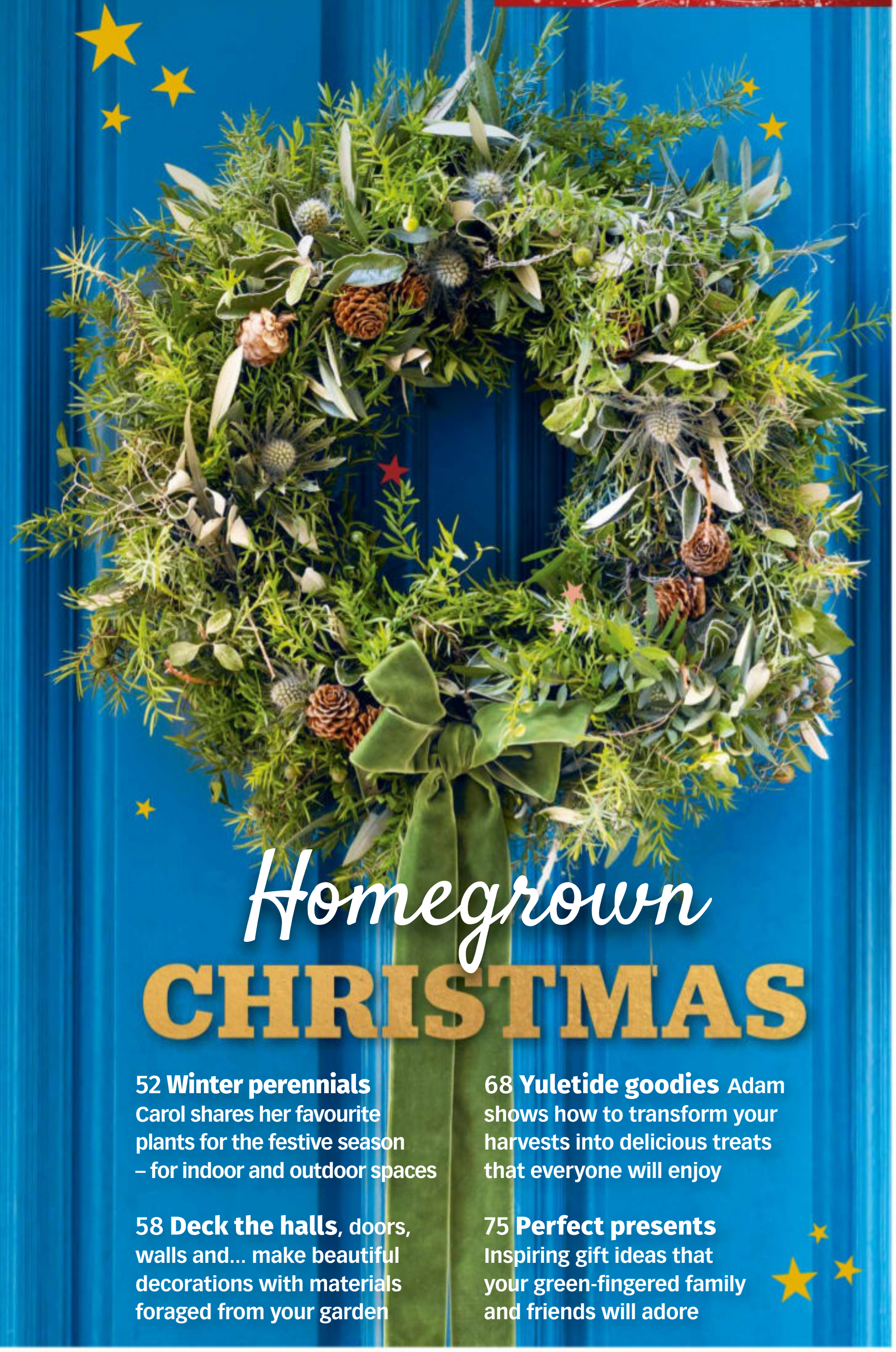
PHOTOS: ALAMY/ILDIKO BEZZEG, IMAGE PROFESSIONALS; SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

Christmas makes



Homegrown CHRISTMAS

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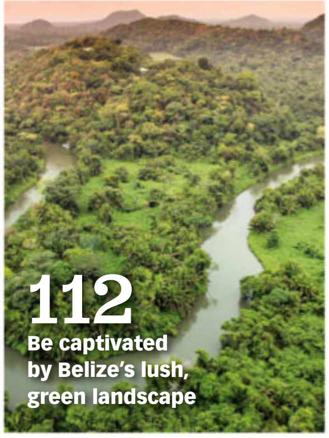

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Jewel red wreath
by Neil Hepworth

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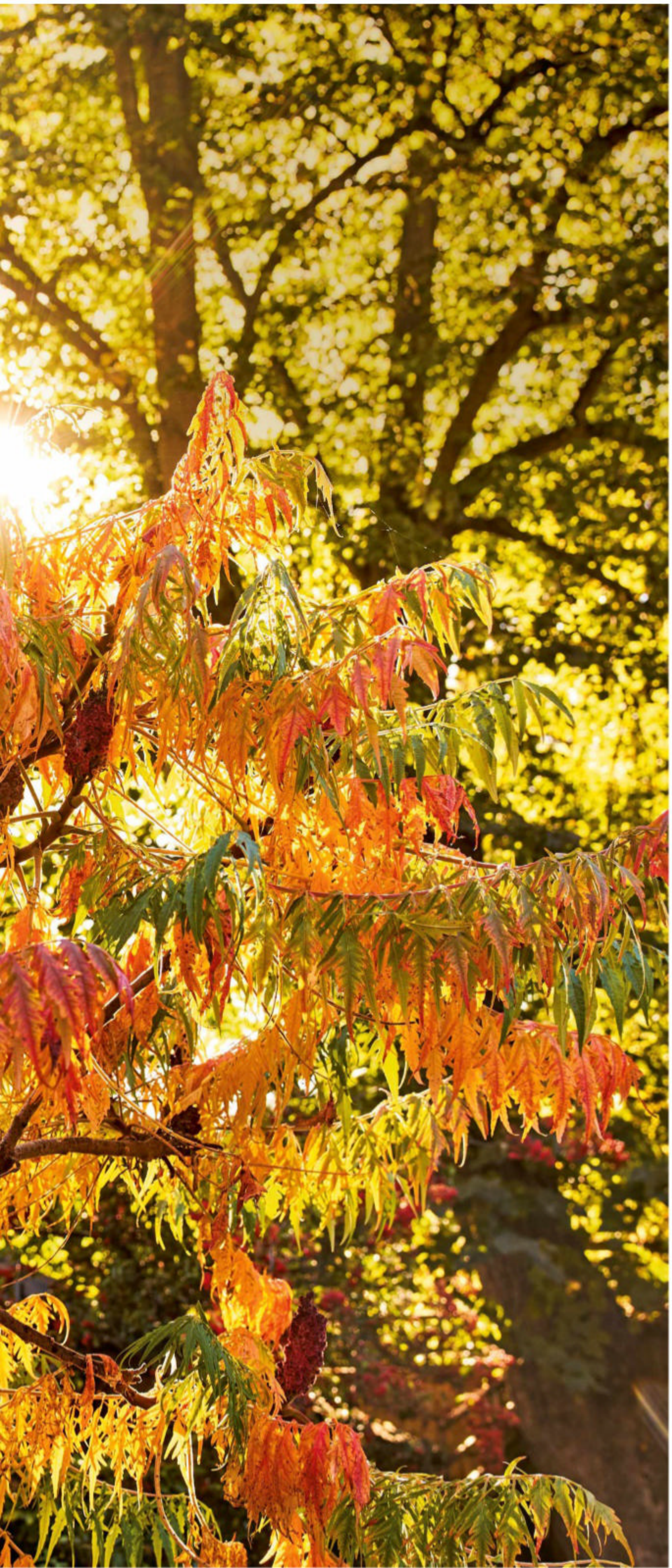
Monty reveals what and where to cut back in your garden now

> “Fear not November’s challenge bold. We’ve books and friends, and hearths that never can grow cold”
>
> Alexander Fraser



We love November

John Keats wrote about the 'seasons of mist and mellow fruitfulness'. Such a famous bit of poetry that it has become a bit clichéd. We should try and update it as we drift into November. Perhaps one of you with a poetic leaning could do something with the other things we find precious at this time of year – a new season of *Strictly Come Dancing* or the first Christmas decorations (mind you, I saw my first Christmas tree this year in mid July). Maybe tins of Quality Street? Or office parties? Think of it as modernising a classic… all contributions welcome.

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR

STAR OF THE MONTH

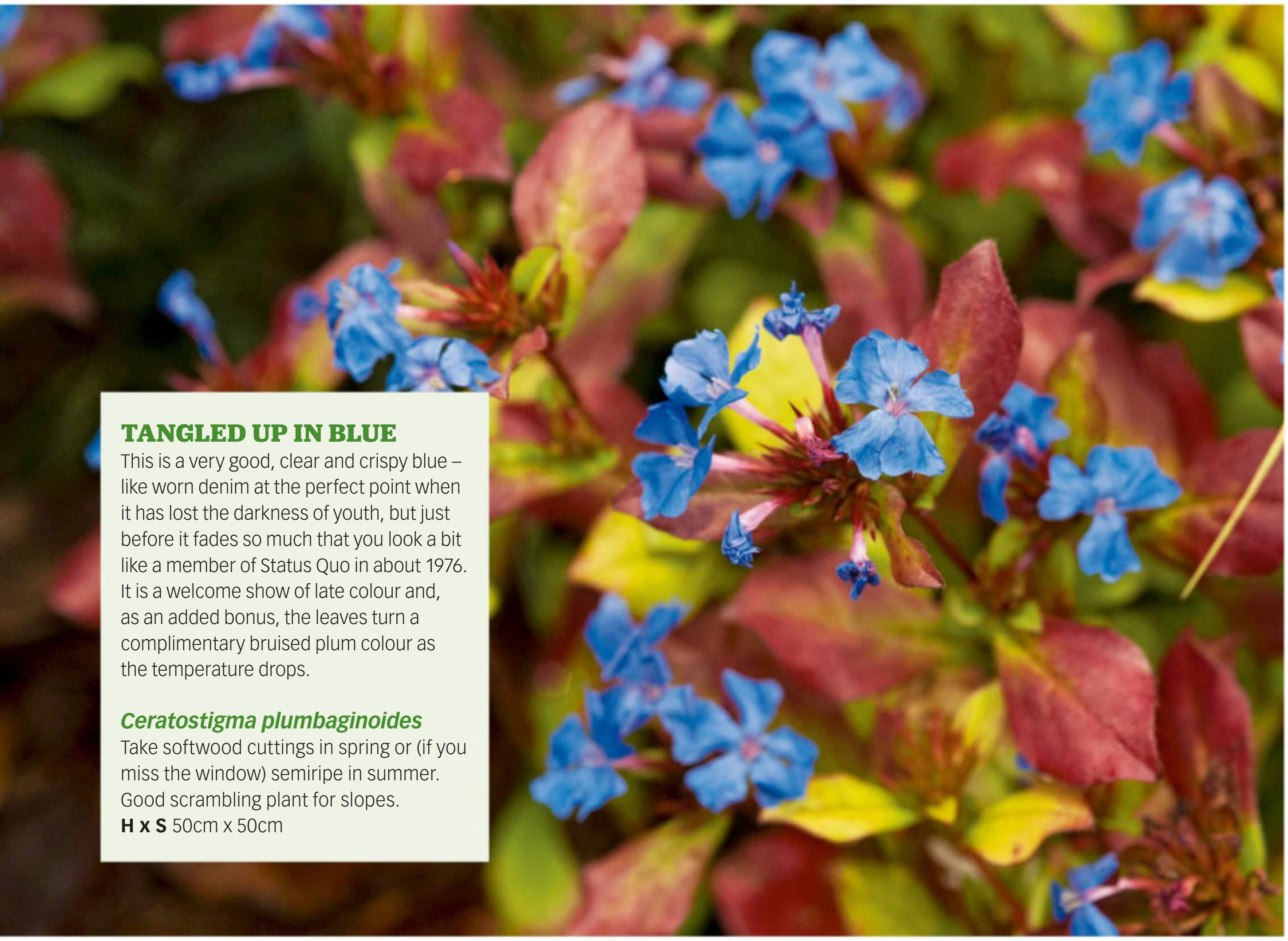
Rhus typhina

Obviously, I love all the plants on these pages, but I am particularly excited by a Rhus at this time of year. Spoilsports will warn you about the suckering habit of this tree but let's ignore them and think instead about the autumn colours. Truly sensational, but you should not choose this moment to go on holiday as they are only there for the briefest of moments. An explosion of umber, mandarin, rosy apple, heart of bonfire, ochre, buttered crumpet, guardsman's tunic, fox at sunrise and heart of fig. In the circumstances I think we can forgive a bit of suckering.

Needs sunshine for the best autumn colour. Propagate from seed or hardwood cuttings. Not for very small gardens.

Height x Spread 5m x 4m

PHOTO: DAVID LOFTUS

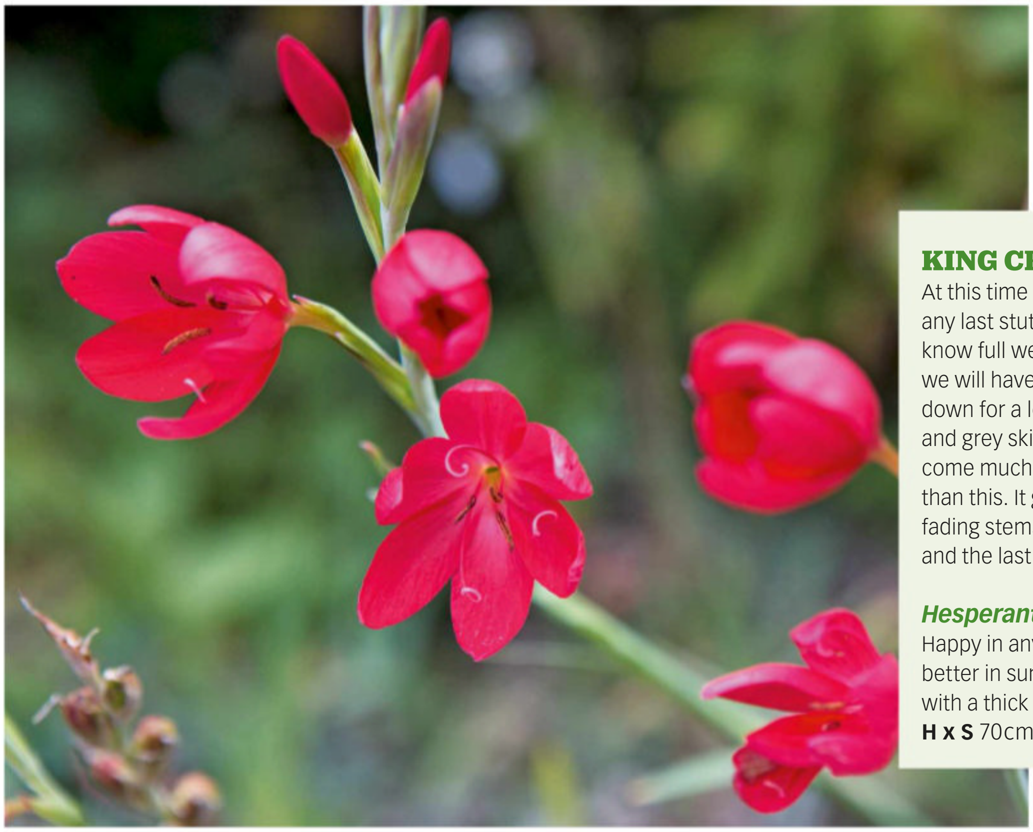


TANGLED UP IN BLUE

This is a very good, clear and crispy blue – like worn denim at the perfect point when it has lost the darkness of youth, but just before it fades so much that you look a bit like a member of Status Quo in about 1976. It is a welcome show of late colour and, as an added bonus, the leaves turn a complimentary bruised plum colour as the temperature drops.

Ceratostigma plumbaginoides

Take softwood cuttings in spring or (if you miss the window) semiripe in summer. Good scrambling plant for slopes.
H x S 50cm x 50cm



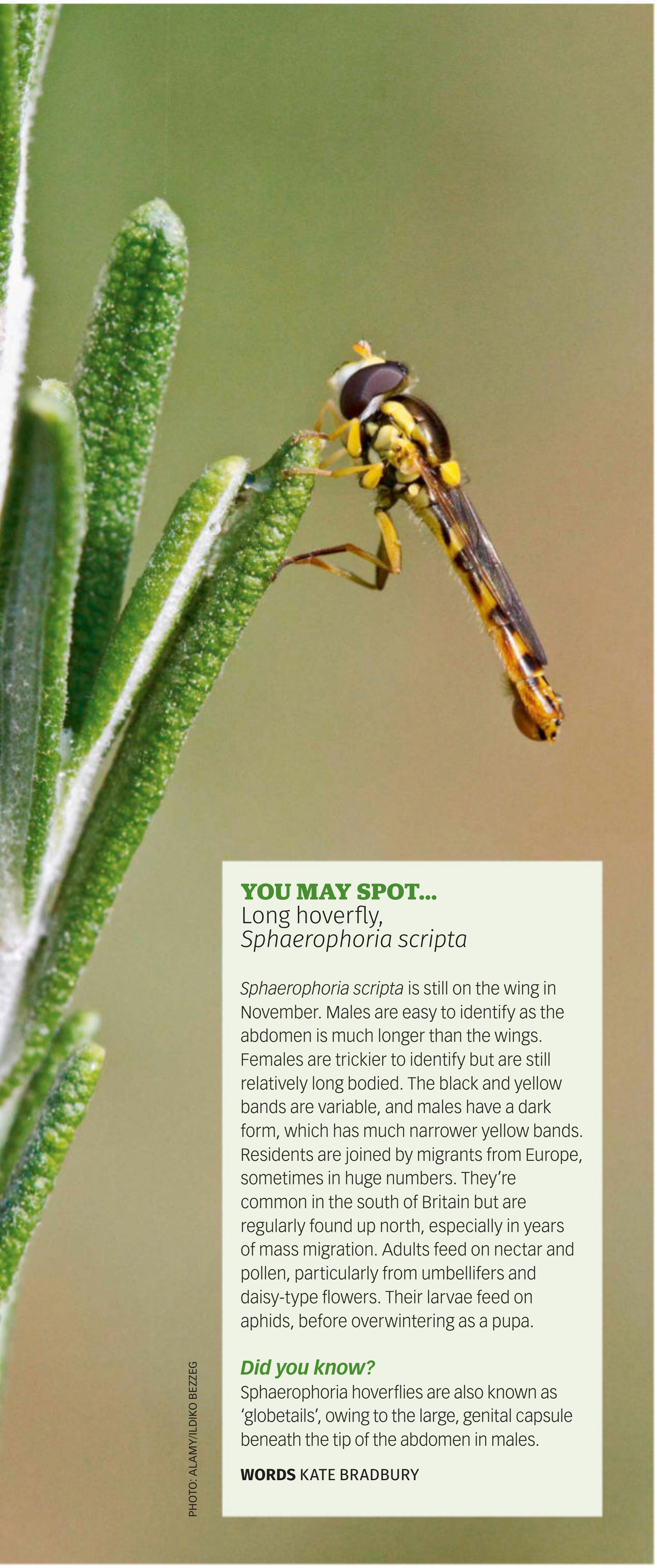
KING CRIMSON

At this time of year we rush to welcome any last stutter of colour because we know full well that in a mere few weeks we will have only memories as we hunker down for a long winter of dark afternoons and grey skies. Those late colours don't come much brighter and more welcome than this. It goes really well with the fading stems of ornamental grasses and the last of the autumn leaves.

Hesperantha coccinea

Happy in any sort of soil, but flowers better in sunshine. In cold gardens cover with a thick mulch in winter.
H x S 70cm x 50cm

PHOTO: TORI CHUGG; SARAH CUTTLE



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YOU MAY SPOT…

Long hoverfly,
Sphaerophoria scripta

Sphaerophoria scripta is still on the wing in November. Males are easy to identify as the abdomen is much longer than the wings. Females are trickier to identify but are still relatively long bodied. The black and yellow bands are variable, and males have a dark form, which has much narrower yellow bands. Residents are joined by migrants from Europe, sometimes in huge numbers. They're common in the south of Britain but are regularly found up north, especially in years of mass migration. Adults feed on nectar and pollen, particularly from umbellifers and daisy-type flowers. Their larvae feed on aphids, before overwintering as a pupa.

Did you know?

Sphaerophoria hoverflies are also known as 'globetails', owing to the large, genital capsule beneath the tip of the abdomen in males.

WORDS KATE BRADBURY

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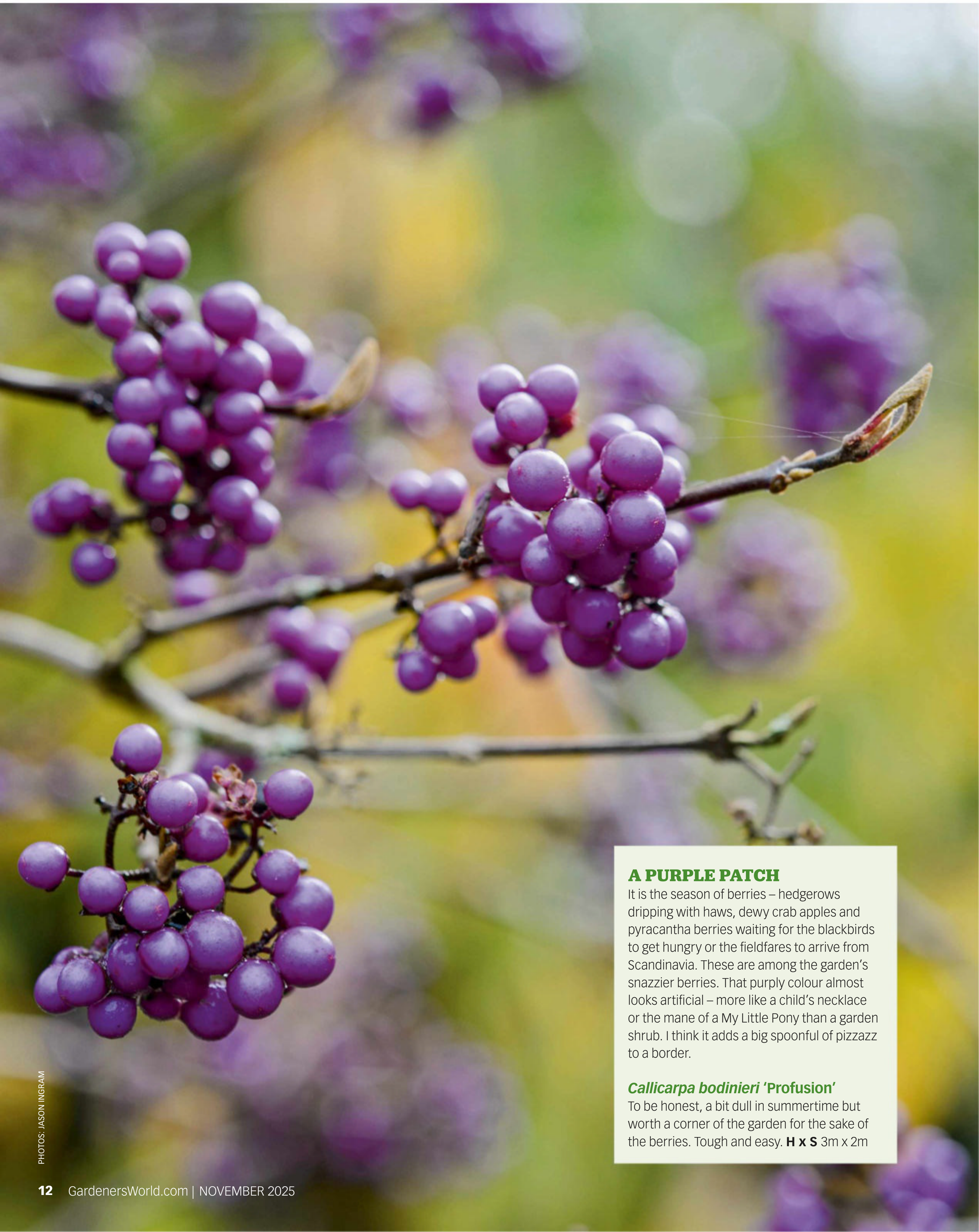

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

A PURPLE PATCH

It is the season of berries – hedgerows dripping with haws, dewy crab apples and pyracantha berries waiting for the blackbirds to get hungry or the fieldfares to arrive from Scandinavia. These are among the garden's snazzier berries. That purply colour almost looks artificial – more like a child's necklace or the mane of a My Little Pony than a garden shrub. I think it adds a big spoonful of pizzazz to a border.

Callicarpa bodinieri 'Profusion'

To be honest, a bit dull in summertime but worth a corner of the garden for the sake of the berries. Tough and easy. **H x S** 3m x 2m

BOUNDLESS GENEROSITY

This month marks the last hurrah of the shrubby salvias after a long and busy summer. These plants are extraordinary – they have not only been flowering since about midsummer, but flowering with both generosity and gusto. They work brilliantly in pots but also make a perfect gap filler in any sunny border. Truly one of the most valuable and useful plants in any garden. Hail to the salvia, we salute you!

Salvia fulgens

Taking cuttings is dead easy. Usually the parent plants survive, but take lots in case we have a hard winter. **H x S** 90cm x 90cm

SHADES OF WHITE

I have a client who is quite obsessed with nerines. Incidentally, they are not all white but also come in strong shades of bubble gum pink. She has a strong childhood memory of her grandmother's garden where they flourished. The best place to plant them is at the base of a south facing wall where the stone (or brick) can work like a big radiator holding as much heat as possible.

***Nerine undulata* 'Alba'**

Plant bulbs in early spring. In colder areas best in a container that can be brought in for winter. **H x S** 50cm x 20cm

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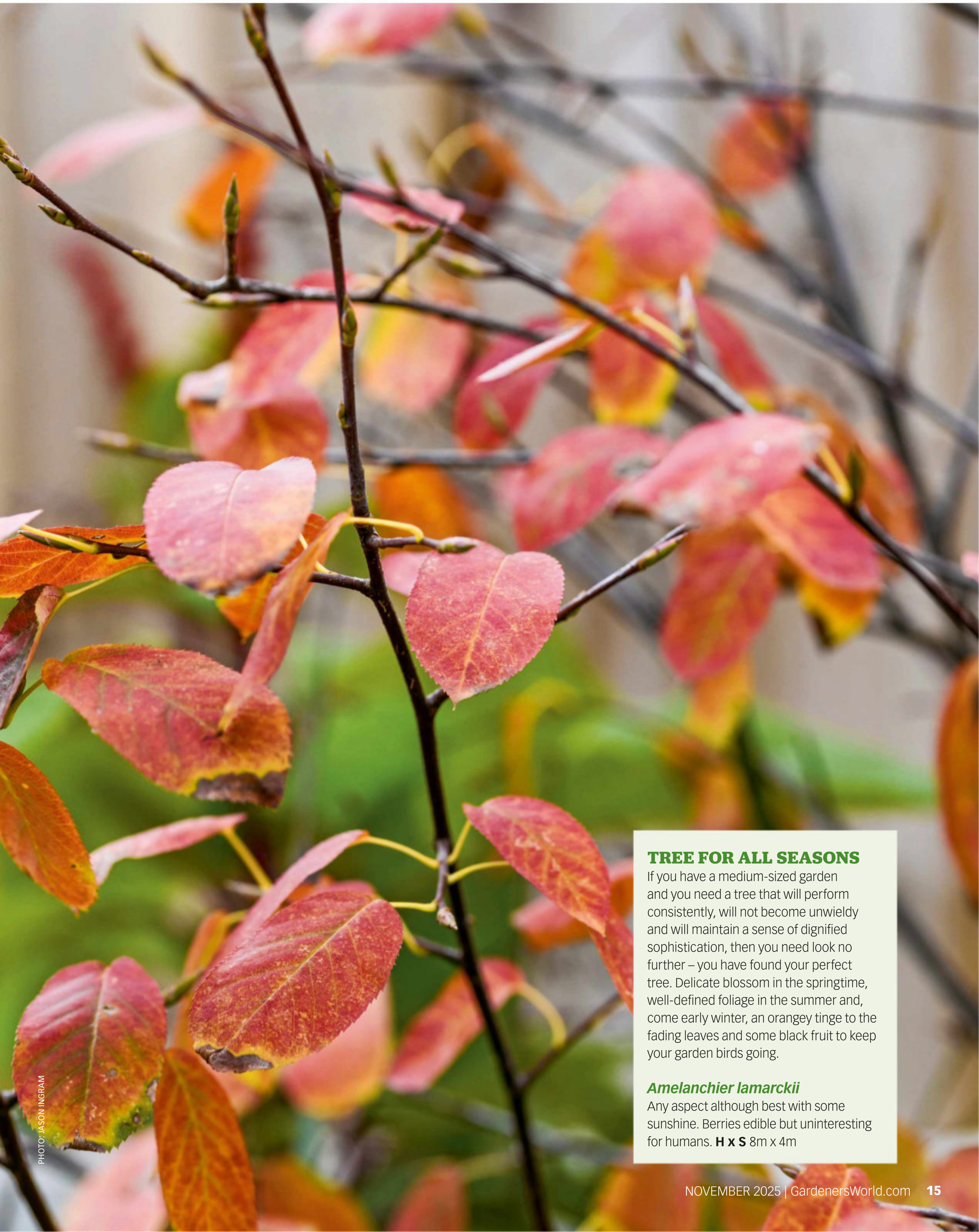

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

TREE FOR ALL SEASONS

If you have a medium-sized garden and you need a tree that will perform consistently, will not become unwieldy and will maintain a sense of dignified sophistication, then you need look no further – you have found your perfect tree. Delicate blossom in the springtime, well-defined foliage in the summer and, come early winter, an orangey tinge to the fading leaves and some black fruit to keep your garden birds going.

Amelanchier lamarckii

Any aspect although best with some sunshine. Berries edible but uninteresting for humans. **H x S** 8m x 4m

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

PLANT UP A POT…
FIRECRACKER

Choose a bold container, bright flowers and shiny berries for an autumnal, bonfire-night inspired display. I bought this old fire bucket online with the idea that it would be fun to fill it with plants that are at their peak in November, using a drill to make three holes in the base to allow any excess water to escape.

With its many, intriguingly-small flowers in shades of red and deep pink, and almost-black berries correlating with the lettering on the bucket, *Fuchsia microphylla* (the small-leaved fuchsia) felt like an obvious choice. Its habit means that its branches extend over the rim of the bucket, giving its flowers space to shine. I then paired it with *Fuchsia* 'Hawkshead', which has bigger, white flowers, and a pair of ferns that enjoy the same shady conditions: *Dryopteris dilatata* (broad buckler fern) and *Cyrtomium falcatum* (holly fern). An ornamental grass such as *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' would be a good alternative.

Ensure that the pot you choose is big enough to accommodate the volume of peat-free multi-purpose compost these plants need to keep them going for several months, then plant in the garden when they are too big for the container.

Tips

- Even if the weather is wet, check if the pot needs watering, as the umbrella effect of the leaves can prevent moisture from reaching the plants' roots.
- Remove browning leaves from the ferns by gently pulling them off from around the base.

WORDS LUCY BELLAMY

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The Full Monty

As *GW* TV draws to a close for the year, **Monty** reflects on the season's filming and looks forward to a short rest before embarking on the winter jobs that keep Longmeadow in shape

By the end of October, filming of *Gardeners' World* at Longmeadow will have finished, to restart next spring. This timetable has remained constant for the past 20 years or so, although I suspect that most viewers would like us to carry on throughout winter. However, the commissioning and scheduling of programmes moves in mysterious ways so it is unlikely to change in a hurry.

The lighting rig in the potting shed is taken down, the eccentrically Heath Robinson-customised wheelbarrow that takes the two monitors linked to the cameras by radio is taken away and parked somewhere deep in the bowels of the BBC, the crew and production team that are so much part of our lives throughout the long filming season disappear for the next four months, and from the beginning of November Longmeadow is returned to us.

'Us' covers two camps. In one, there is the Don family, which in practice nowadays mostly consists of Sarah and I, plus frequent visits from grandchildren; and the other comprises myself and the Longmeadow gardening team that do so much work behind the scenes to keep the garden programme-worthy. 'Team' is perhaps a grandiose word for the two full-time and one part-time gardeners, but they are the unsung heroes of the programme. Without them Longmeadow would quickly fall short of the required state to sustain 23 hour-long programmes, each requiring two days of filming for ten hours. Even if I was not writing books and columns, giving talks – let alone travelling and making series about gardens around the world – I could not single-handedly keep Longmeadow looking its best. It is a ridiculously intense, packed garden and needs a lot of work to keep it that way. Nevertheless, television has a voracious appetite for 'content' and every scrap of that intensity is used by the camera.

So we all breath a sigh of relief and for a couple of weeks we bask in the lack of pressure of not having to prepare for the arrival of the next film crew. But that soon passes. In fact, for the next month or so we enter one of the busiest periods of our gardening year. For a start, we can now make a mess – a luxury that we indulge in. All the housekeeping projects that have accumulated through the year can now be tackled. We can dig trenches, lay paths, repair buildings and not tidy half-dug borders at the end of the working day.

There is the small matter of the weather to contend with. A couple of years ago a chunk of the garden was flooded from October to March, but at the time of writing with the ground still baked stone-hard the thought of a sodden garden would be a delicious setting to rights of this summer's drought.

> *"It is a ridiculously intense, packed garden and needs a lot of work to keep it that way"*

And there is a lot of seasonal gardening still to do. A couple of thousand tulip bulbs have to be planted, mostly in pots. I always do this, not because my team is not capable but because I really enjoy it. I draw up a spreadsheet of last year's pots and plan what to grow in each part of Longmeadow so we get the best possible display next spring. In that sense the hand of television is still at work because that display is for you, via the cameras, rather than just for Sarah, myself and the grandchildren.

We lift any tender plants – dahlias, cannas, salvias, gingers and eucomis – and store them in pots. We try to get any division and replanting done before winter sets in, and certainly any trees, shrubs or hedging do much better if planted now rather than next year. The citrus plants are wheeled into the big greenhouse and the Dicksonias wrapped to protect them from frost. These things have to be preemptive – rather like staking, they should be done before they need doing – and the more diligent we are, the later frosts seem to come, but I have been caught out before with temperatures plummeting overnight as soon as we reach November.

Then there is leaf-fall to embrace. I stress the embracing because we treasure our leafmould both as an important constituent of homemade potting compost and as the perfect mulching material for woodland areas like the spring garden. So every leaf that can be gathered up is treated as a valuable harvest.

Should we be filming all of this? Probably. I would not mind at all, but there is no doubt that filming would make it all take twice as long, and add a level of scrutiny and pressure that we are happy to do without for a few winter months before the filming circus returns all too quickly next February.

Monty

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

MONTY ON TV Catch Monty and the *Gardeners' World* team on Friday nights this month – see TV listings – and listen as he discusses filming *Monty Don's British Gardens* in our Conversations series at **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**

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H x S 15cm x 15cm
F Mar-Apr

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F Jun-Jul

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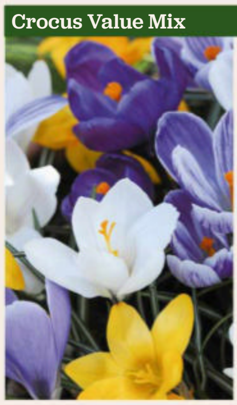

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H x S 10cm x 5cm
F Mar-Apr
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Expert's choice

Euonymus

These variable, tough and decorative shrubs have multiple uses in the garden says, **Graham Rice**

If you're driving along a quiet country lane in summer and you notice a stretch of hedgerow covered in cobwebs, well, you've probably just spotted one of our most intriguing native shrubs. This is the spindle bush (*Euonymus europaeus*) and the cobwebs are woven by spindle ermine moth caterpillars as protection from foraging birds eager to feed their broods.

Occasionally, the tiny grubs will defoliate a whole plant but, in the decades through which I've been growing euonymus, this spring was the first that I've had ermine moths in the garden. And the plant is now doing well again, thriving even. You'd never know.

The common name 'spindle bush' derives from the fact that the exceptionally hard wood can be sharpened to a fine point to make spindles used in spinning wool; today its wood makes the finest artists' charcoal. Its unusual red fleshy fruits open to reveal orange seeds and are recognisable across the whole group, which includes both deciduous and evergreen varieties.

Evergreens, and especially the variegated forms, are more often seen as ground cover, hedges or even climbers with their aerial roots clinging to walls in the same way that ivy does.

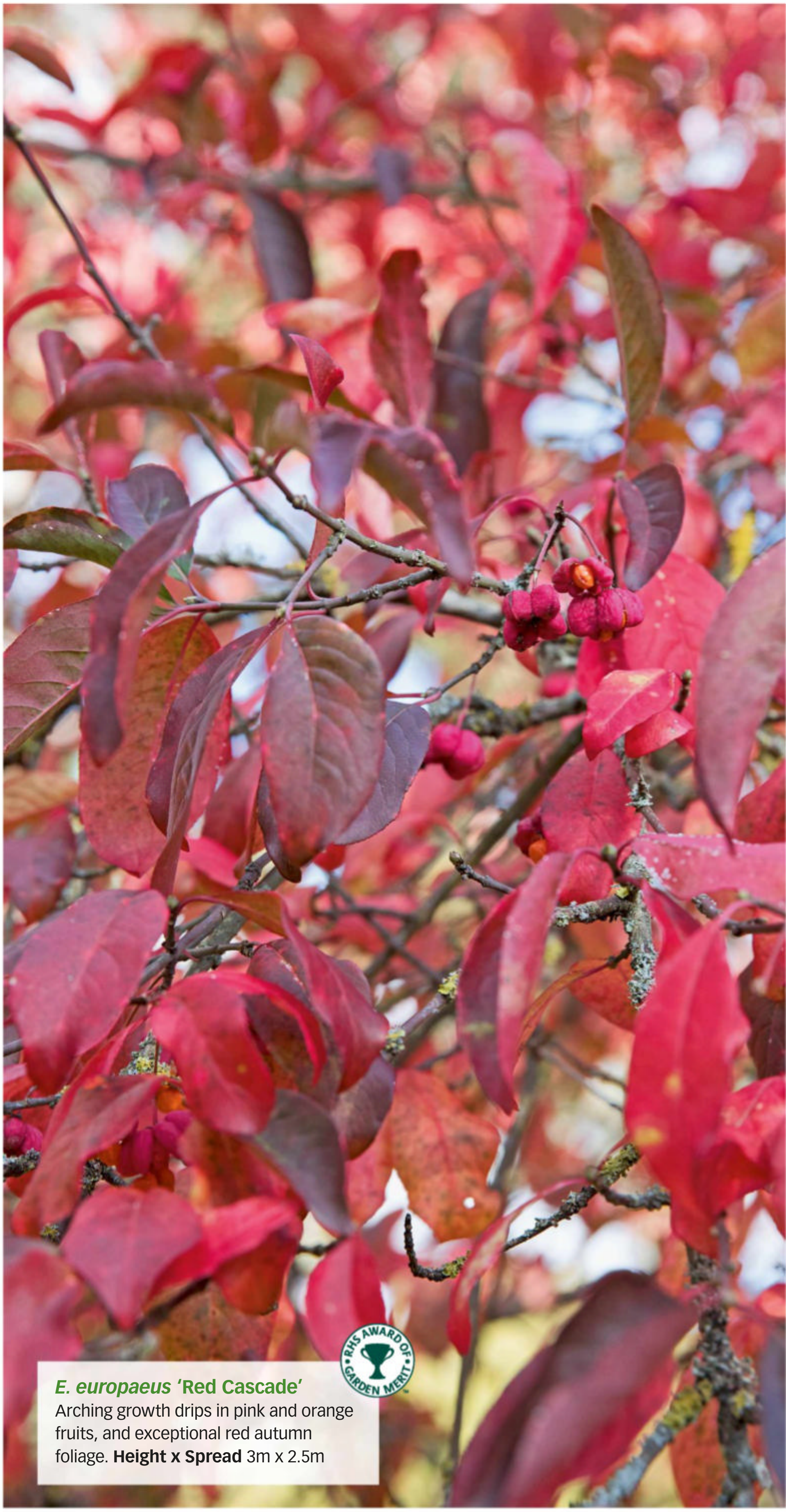
And if you're worried about those pesky ermine moths? My advice: live and let live.

Care

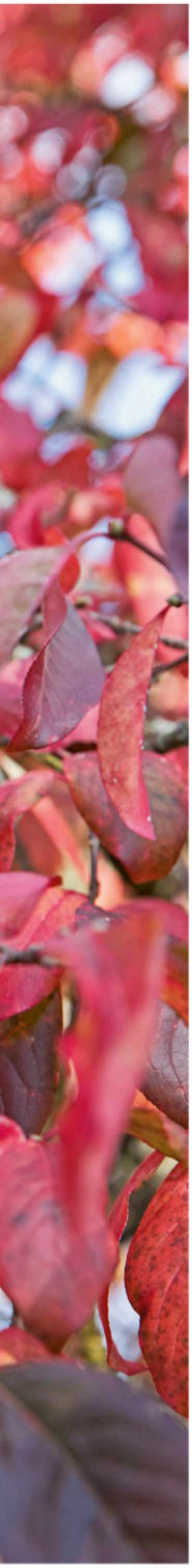
- Evergreen varieties thrive in most soils, in sun or shade. Deciduous types prefer sun.
- Clip evergreens to shape in late spring, but allow deciduous types to mature naturally.
- Evergreens are good for hedging.
- Pick off early signs of ermine moth, but even severely damaged plants will usually recover well and soon produce fresh foliage.

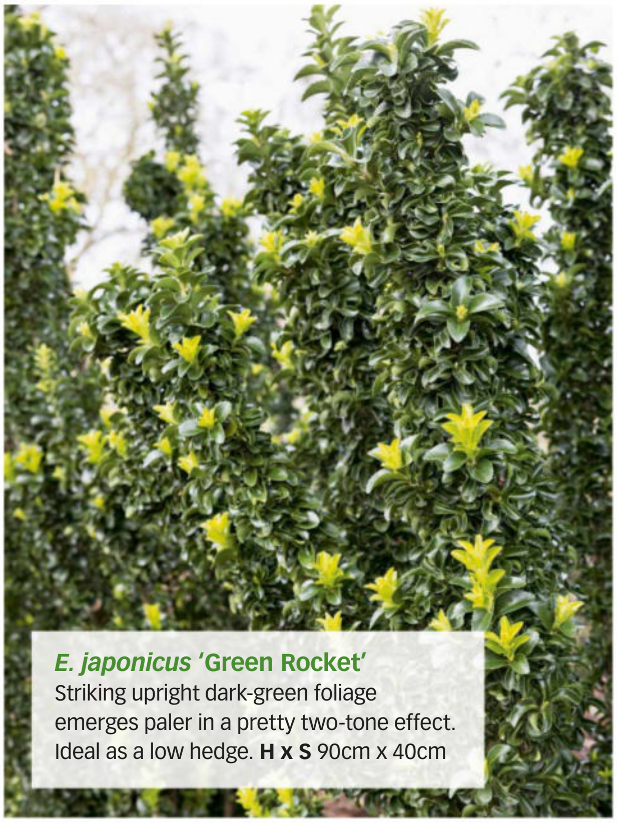
Where to buy

ashwoodnurseries.com, 01384 401996;
burncoose.co.uk, 01209 860316;
crocus.co.uk, 01344 578000

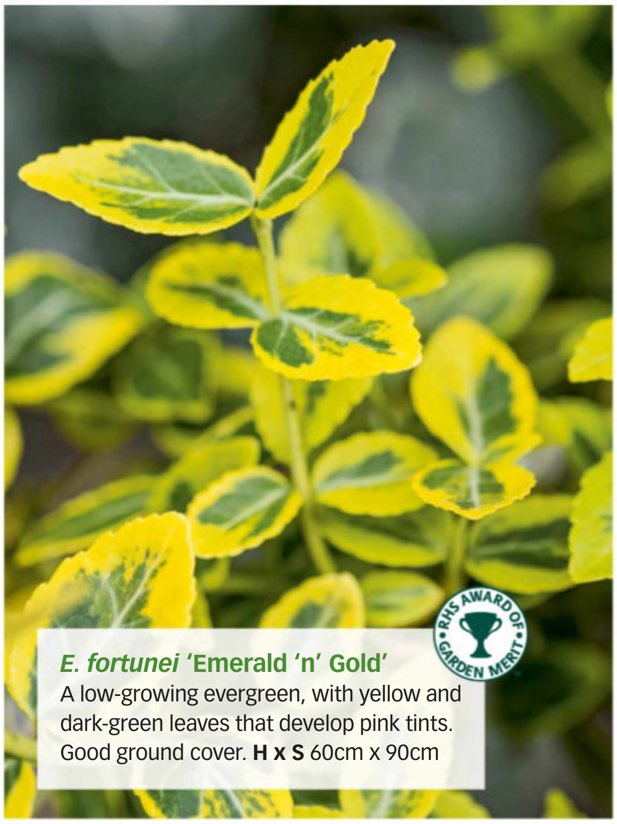


E. europaeus 'Red Cascade'
Arching growth drips in pink and orange fruits, and exceptional red autumn foliage. **Height x Spread** 3m x 2.5m

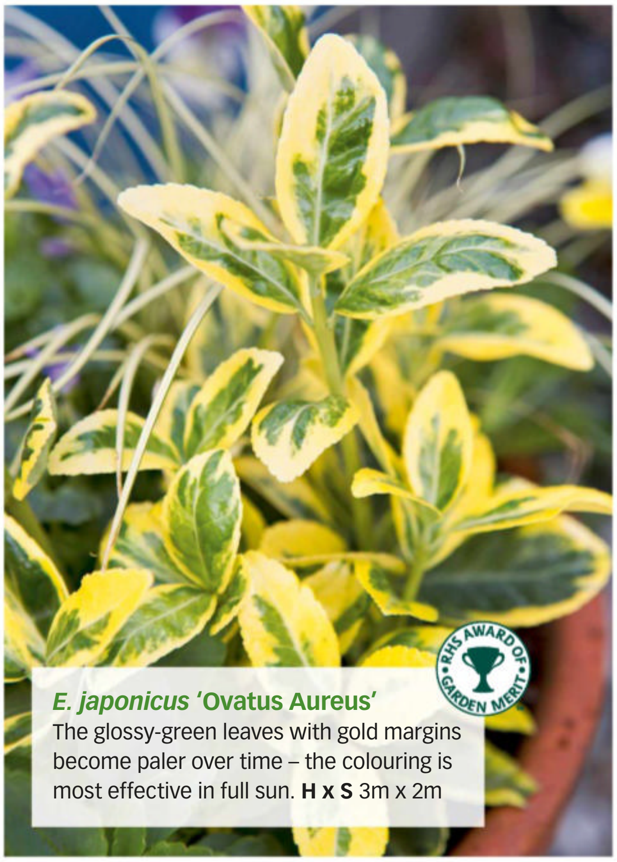




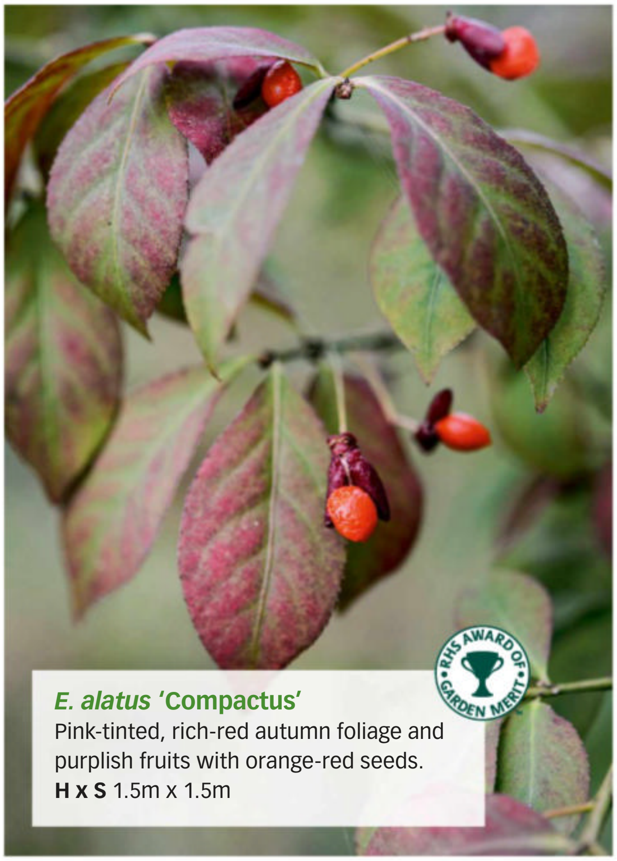
E. japonicus **'Green Rocket'**
Striking upright dark-green foliage emerges paler in a pretty two-tone effect. Ideal as a low hedge. **H x S** 90cm x 40cm



E. fortunei **'Emerald 'n' Gold'**
A low-growing evergreen, with yellow and dark-green leaves that develop pink tints. Good ground cover. **H x S** 60cm x 90cm



E. japonicus **'Ovatus Aureus'**
The glossy-green leaves with gold margins become paler over time – the colouring is most effective in full sun. **H x S** 3m x 2m



E. alatus **'Compactus'**
Pink-tinted, rich-red autumn foliage and purplish fruits with orange-red seeds. **H x S** 1.5m x 1.5m

Euonymus

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Evergreen foliage colour	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩
Deciduous foliage colour									🟪	🟪	🟪	

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

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Golden hour

Use your **2 for 1 Gardens** card to the full this month to enjoy the dramatic autumn colour on display in many gardens – here are just a few of the highlights of this vibrant season

Reflected glory

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With the vivid colours of autumn in mind, Arthur Soames, owner of **Sheffield Park & Garden** in the early 20th century, introduced many of the season's stars to this East Sussex garden. They're now so spectacular that this riot of colour is Grade I listed and internationally recognised. There are over 250 acers in the garden, with leaf colours ranging from lime green to deep crimson, as well as the largest collection of *Nyssa sylvatica* on one site. Lakes were later added to the garden to reflect this kaleidoscope of colour. **OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £18**, single reduced to £9. **nationaltrust.org.uk/sheffield-park**

East meets West

SAVE £9.80

Created by two trailblazing women in the 20th century – a Scottish explorer and a Japanese garden designer – **The Japanese Garden at Cowden**, in Clackmannanshire, is testament to their creativity and vision. Key elements of Japanese design are evident across its seven acres, from ponds and bridges to a restored decorative pavilion. While the karesansui (dry garden), with its raked gravel, moss and stones, has cool tones, the rest of the garden glows with the vibrant hues of Japanese maples. **OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £9.80**, single reduced to £7.80. Booking recommended. **cowdengarden.com**

PHOTOS: KLAUS LABESIUS; NATIONAL TRUST/TONY GILL, LAURENCE PERRY

SAVE £6

Seasonal flourish

Visit before the end of autumn to see **Ardmaddy Castle Gardens**, Argyll, in one final dramatic flush of colour. Set in a horseshoe bay with views across the water and sheltered by wooded hills, the garden features many beautiful and interesting plants. In the walled garden, you'll find productive fruit and vegetable beds enclosed by low box hedging. Beyond are wooded walks and a water garden full of autumn colour. You may also spot red squirrels in the woodland, busily foraging and storing food for the coming winter. **OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £6**. **gardens-of-argyll.co.uk**

SAVE £9

Mixing fire and water

Nestled into the banks of the River Wye in Herefordshire are the charming terraced Victorian gardens of **Brobury House**. Water plays a central role here, with several pools, ponds, a bog garden and stream. Enjoy the seasonal displays of fiery autumn foliage and Michaelmas daisies in shades of pink and mauve, and stroll along the specimen tree walk to reach the two-acre water meadow. From here, look back at the array of beautiful and ancient trees, including the Corsican pine and black mulberry, standing out against the backdrop of rolling autumnal countryside. **OFFER Garden: 2 for 1 £9**. **broburyhouse.co.uk**

SAVE £22

Picture perfect

Described as "a living work of art" when it first opened in the 18th century, the painterly qualities of **Stourhead**, in Wiltshire, are still just as striking today. At this time of year, autumn's brushstrokes sweep across its landscape and trees, creating a richly coloured masterpiece, while a glorious palette of golden yellows, ochres, burnt oranges and deep russets dance on the glassy lake. So take a walk across the Palladian bridge and admire the picturesque vistas that have delighted visitors for nearly 300 years. **OFFER House & garden: 2 for 1 £22**, single reduced to £11. **nationaltrust.org.uk/stourhead**

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Before visiting a garden always check its website for opening and closing times as they can change

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Tidying up Longmeadow is a gradual process and weather dependent, but once perennials start to collapse or turn soggy, it's time to compost them

> “The key thing is not to worry – if it goes wrong, well, you've learned a lesson and the plant is probably going to recover quicker than you”

Making the cut

Not sure what, when and how to prune and tidy up this autumn and winter? Then follow **Monty**'s simple guidelines to take the stress out of cutting back

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM

“Our philosophy on perennials and grasses is simple: if it doesn’t look good or needs propping up to look presentable, then cut it back”

TOP LEFT With careful use of a long-handled pruning saw, Monty can often avoid having to climb a ladder **LEFT** Leave dried seedheads and grasses standing for as long as possible, to provide winter food and shelter for wildlife **OPPOSITE** Monty gives his shrub roses a light prune in autumn, simply removing any overly long or unwanted shoots

It’s sometimes said that a good plant dies gracefully, and that a plant that looks good in death is a valuable addition to the garden through the colder months. There’s truth in this and when autumn begins to slide into winter I like to leave as much growth as possible, so things don’t look too bare. It’s different every year – last year was particularly wet, and by Christmas things were battered, but in previous years we’ve left a great deal standing, even into February.

There is a balance to be struck between keeping the garden neat, and leaving slightly untidy plants to overwinter. This approach comes back to the basic philosophy at Longmeadow, which we apply quite strictly: keep your edges sharp, but everything in between can be soft. This can mean a garden entrance defined by a hedge, with soft borders beyond, or piles of leaves and twigs left for winter habitat within a sharp framework.

I always smarten up hedges and topiary, ensuring they’re crisp and clearly cut into shape. Trees with bare stems, or multi-stemmed shrubs, are cleaned back so we can appreciate the structure of their stems. But otherwise, don’t worry too much. It’s okay if you’ve got fallen foliage on the ground because it will support wildlife, and we often have hedgehogs overwintering in this kind of habitat.

Timing choices

When to cut back perennials and grasses in winter depends largely on the weather and how soggy and collapsed they’ve become. Our philosophy at Longmeadow is simple: if it doesn’t look good or needs propping up to look presentable, then cut it back. This cutting-back window is gradual, starting as early as mid-October and continuing right through to Christmas, depending on the weather. The wetter or windier it is, the more cutting back you’ll need to do. If the garden is holding and the plants look fine, there’s no need to cut back at all until March, and any seedheads and hollow stems will provide valuable food and habitat for birds and overwintering insects.

Our shrub roses get a quick clip with shears in October or November to remove any excess growth and I don’t touch many of them again – that quick clip is all they get for the year. For any that have grown a bit leggy or are getting older, I will go over them with a pair of secateurs in February to remove some old growth. We also prune climbing roses in autumn or late winter, cutting back to a framework from which sideshoots will flower.

With roses the key is to know whether your rose flowers on new or old growth, as this determines your pruning regime.

> *"Start with the basics, removing any damaged, crossing or diseased growth"*

Rambling roses flower on old growth made the previous year, so if you hard prune them in February, you're not going to have any flowers that summer. You will get lots of new growth and it will be very healthy, but there will be no flowers. Shrub roses, all hybrid tea roses, climbing roses and floribunda roses all flower on new growth so can be pruned hard in March and you'll still get flowers in the summer.

Tackling fruit trees

Many fruit trees are pruned to control shape or fruitfulness, and in winter I start with the basics, removing any damaged, crossing or diseased growth and, if necessary, reducing the size of the tree overall. If you hard prune in winter, the tree will respond by putting out vigorous new shoots, but none of these will produce any fruit for a while, so bear this in mind before making your cuts. Summer pruning, on the other hand, restricts growth, which is why we summer prune espaliers, cordons and fans.

My rule is always to cut back to something. This could be to the trunk, it might be just a leaf, but I never cut at random. When you cut to something, it makes it much easier to keep the tree balanced and prevents it becoming lopsided. Always ask yourself why you are doing something and what the result will be – think about what you want the result to be in a few years' time.

But, when all's said and done, don't become worried about when and how to cut back. Gardening shouldn't be about always striving to do the right thing; it should be much more intuitive and responsive. If it's working, then you're doing it right, even if your approach is different from everyone else's. Enjoy the process of discovery to be had around how your garden is shaped, the interplay between tight control and relishing in the looseness and natural progression of nature. I don't think they're mutually exclusive. In fact, that's part of the skill and the fun of gardening. ☐

Catch up with Monty in any episodes of *Gardeners' World* that you missed – available on iPlayer

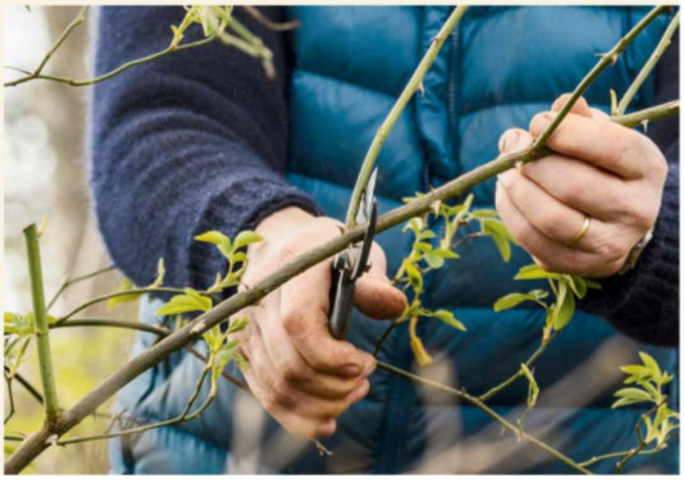
BBC iPLAYER

Get kitted out

I must confess I love gardening kit of any kind, and my advice would be to always, with all tools, buy the best that you can afford, particularly if you're going to garden for the rest of your life.

When it comes to cutting and pruning, always use the smallest piece of kit that will do the job. If your secateurs aren't powerful enough, go up to the next stage and use loppers. And if that won't do it, get a saw. And if that saw isn't working, get a bigger saw! On the other hand, don't use a great big saw to do a small thing. If it's small and comfortable and you are in control, you'll do a much better job.

- **Secateurs** Essential for pruning any kind of woody shrub or tree, but mostly for daily tasks such as deadheading, harvesting and having a tidy-up. You can generally use secateurs to cut anything up to 1cm thick, and some powered versions will cut up to 2.5cm.
- **Loppers** If something is hard to reach or a bit tougher, I turn to my loppers. I have both long handled and short – the short ones are often easier to use in tight spots. Loppers' longer handles give you more leverage, so it is easier to cut through more stubborn branches. Depending on the model, these will cut anything up to around 4cm thick.
- **Pruning saw** For anything loppers and secateurs can't handle, like tough older wood, I use a pruning saw. I favour Japanese ones, which cut on the pull movement. I have small foldable ones and ones that extend to several metres.



TOP Pruning saws come in various sizes, for cutting branches that are too thick for loppers MIDDLE Loppers have long handles that provide greater leverage RIGHT Secateurs are handy and compact, ideal for pruning thinner, softer stems

Listen to more pruning advice from **Monty** in our Conversations podcast at **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**

NEXT MONTH **Discover how Monty prepares for Christmas, including gifts, foraged decorations and festive veg**

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advertisement feature

Great taste, no waste

Want to save your leftover veg? Pickle it the proper way with Sarson's Malt Vinegar, craft-brewed using quality British ingredients

Whether you're growing top notch fruit and vegetables on your allotment or in your garden patch, it doesn't just happen – it takes time, persistence and a lot of care. The same goes for creating the distinctive flavour of Sarson's Malt Vinegar.

Made from scratch by master brewers using British malted barley, it's matured seven times longer than most vinegars in century-old wooden vats, for a rich and rounded taste. Sarson's is brewed for food and has been ever since it was first created by Thomas Sarson in Craven Street, London, more than 230 years ago.

So, if you find yourself with a glut of produce this autumn or simply don't get round to using up what you've bought, let the UK's leading vinegar brand help you create some delectable pickles.

Pickling perfection

You can pickle almost any vegetable, but Sarson's Malt Vinegar most suits those that can stand up to its hearty flavour. Think earthy beetroot, bitter onions and garlic or fiery chillies. The vinegar's kick will elevate the taste, while the natural acidity locks in freshness, helping your leftovers last for months on end.

That's just the start...

How does a melt-in-the-mouth steak or a full-bodied coq au vin sound? Tenderness is everything when it comes to meat, and Sarson's Malt Vinegar can help. Its natural acidity will break down tough muscle fibres, making meat softer, while adding a rich, tangy taste at the same time.

The secret sauce

Sarson's Malt and Distilled Malt Vinegar can also bring strength and depth to sauces and marinades from cuisines right across the world. Use it for a sticky rack of ribs or a Caribbean-style chicken or add a delightful piquancy to the richness of a glossy Sunday roast gravy.

Shake it up

Looking to take your home mixology up a level? Sarson's can bring a unique, zesty twist to cocktails. For example, a classic shrub (a vinegar-based syrup) adds a tart, fruitiness to sodas, tonics or even iced teas. You can also use it in a switchel – a zingy sweetened drink made with vinegar, ginger and molasses, for a revitalising boost.

Something sweet?

Surprisingly, vinegar is even perfect for baking, as it can help create a light, fluffy texture in cakes and muffins, while also balancing the sweetness to give a subtle complexity to every bite. It'll stabilise the egg whites in a meringue, too, to ensure a crisp outer shell and a soft, pillowy centre – your pavlovas will never be the same again.

For more inspiration, visit
sarsons.co.uk/recipes

SARSON'S
SINCE
1794

advertisement feature

CRAFT BREWED
SINCE 1794
SARSON'S
MALT VINEGAR

Top tip: Any soft herb will work in this recipe, so don't be afraid to experiment with whatever you have growing at home.

Pan fried cod & salt & vinegar mash with a buttery vinegar parsley sauce

SERVES 4 | PREP 10 mins | COOK 35 mins

1kg floury potatoes, peeled and cut evenly
150ml milk, warm
50g butter
2 tbsp Sarson's Malt Vinegar
500g cod loin, cut into 4 even pieces
For the parsley sauce
25g butter
20g plain flour
300ml milk
20g fresh flat leaf parsley, finely chopped
2 tbsp Sarson's Malt Vinegar

1 Add the potatoes to a large saucepan and cover with cold water and a good pinch of salt. Bring to a boil and simmer for 15-20 mins until very tender.
2 Drain and return to the saucepan with the milk and half the butter, and another pinch of salt. Heat gently as you mash the potatoes until smooth and creamy. Splash in 1 tbsp of Sarson's Malt Vinegar, then cover and set aside.
3 For the sauce, melt the butter in a small saucepan over a medium heat. Add the flour and stir into a paste. When bubbling, add the milk a little at a time, stirring constantly. Bring to a simmer and cook for 2 mins until glossy and thickened. Stir in the parsley and season to taste, then finish with the Sarson's Malt Vinegar.
4 Heat the remaining butter in a frying pan. When melted and foaming, add the cod and cook for a few mins each side, spooning over the butter until golden and cooked through, then add the remaining Sarson's Malt Vinegar.
5 Serve the cod with the mash on the side and the sauce poured over the top.

Braised red cabbage

SERVES 6 | PREP 10 mins | COOK 1 hr

70ml Sarson's Malt Vinegar
1 red cabbage, sliced
1 red onion, sliced
80g soft light brown sugar
150ml red wine
large knob of butter
1 cinnamon stick
1 star anise
1 apple, grated

1 Add all the ingredients to a heavy-bottomed pan over a medium heat and stir well. Cover with a lid and leave to braise for 1 hr or until the cabbage is tender and the liquid has become reduced and glossy. Serve with your roast dinner.

CRAFT BREWED
SINCE 1794
SARSON'S
MALT VINEGAR

PHOTO: SARAH CUTTLE

NO-FEAR GARDENING

PART 6: KEEPING IT SHIPSHAPE

As it's not such a busy time of year in the garden, late autumn is ideal for tackling easy maintenance and tidying jobs – **Frances Tophill** shows you how

November is the month when the garden really stops growing. There are mild autumnal days, but when the temperature consistently drops, plant growth all but ceases. Sad as this may seem, it does present a welcome opportunity to catch up on the things we've neglected when the plants demanded all our attention.

There's no need to be too tidy though – leave old, faded plant material in borders if you can, as it provides habitat and foraging opportunities for the creatures who live in the garden. But do clean any bird baths after the leaves have dropped.

The neglected corners, piles of pots, sheds, greenhouses and patios that have seen good use over recent months can now be cleared out, organised, tidied and cleaned, ready for next year. Under glass and in sheds this is especially important, to provide a comfortable, tidy place for us to spend time during the colder months, and it can also help to reduce pest infestations next year. Creatures like red spider mites can be reduced or removed by cleaning and clearing out old plant debris and compost.

The patio is a place that tends to gather clutter because it's used so much over the warmer months. Clearing it now gives you the chance to do two key tasks that often get neglected during the summer. The first is preserving wooden garden furniture – oiling and protecting it from winter weather increases its life expectancy, as does mending any broken or damaged parts before they get beyond repair. The second task is weeding between paving or bricks to keep the patio looking good and accessible.

OILING WOODEN FURNITURE

There are various oils that will protect garden furniture, including linseed, Danish and teak, or you can use a coloured product that matches your furniture. Oil is best for unpainted, porous wood. Use a cloth to rub in the oil and apply several coats. I find seven coats work for tired furniture, and two or three are usually enough if you do it regularly.

Rake up fallen leaves from lawns regularly, then use to make leafmould

DEALING WITH LEAF DROP

Falling leaves are a natural part of autumn, although sometimes new gardeners think their plants have died when the leaves start to fall off! Leaf drop is a mixed experience for gardeners, clearing leaves keeps things neat but leaf litter left on the ground is an especially good habitat for insects and butterfly larvae, which in turn feed many a hungry bird in the winter months.

My solution is never to burn or remove them entirely, but to clear them from areas where they're likely to cause slips and trips, like concrete pathways and especially steps. They can also be removed from places where they look unsightly or are likely to damage garden features or smother plants. If they sit for long periods on a lawn, they can leave a bare patch behind. I also rake them from alongside paths and out of heavily planted borders, where they can cause plants' stems to rot and collapse, and can cover bulbs that emerge in early spring.

Removing fallen leaves from these places will keep them out of sight and help the garden grow next year. I collect up the leaves into piles, bags or bays and after a year or so they'll have broken down into lovely leafmould. This is a product that works beautifully as a mulch or when sieved it makes a great potting-compost ingredient. Applied as a mulch it will help sandy soil retain water and clay soil become more friable.

PHOTO: SARAH CUTTLE

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SORTING YOUR CONTAINERS

This is a great time to go through your pots and give them a tidy and sort out. You'll likely be moving them around anyway, to bring any tender plants under cover. You can also remove any faded bedding plants, ready for bulb planting, and pick off fallen leaves.

When you go through your old containers – whether plastic propagation pots in the greenhouse or prized larger terracotta pots – it usually results in the discovery of many empty ones or crispy, dead plants that are long forgotten. With these, simply tip the old compost and any spent plants onto the compost heap, then scrub the pots clean to remove potential pests or pest eggs. Once dry, put them in a nice pile ready to refill with fresh plants and compost, or to recycle. Many garden centres now run pot recycling schemes, so plastic pots can be returned there. Do also remember that most terracotta pots aren't frost proof, so they will need to be protected in a shed or under an insulating cover of hessian or fleece.

With a little tidying and cleaning, your largest and most decorative empty containers can still look good over winter and work well as punctuation points around the garden. Incidentally, moving large pots will often reveal discolouration of a patio area, which is a great incentive to get out the hose and a stiff broom and scrub the paving.

After cleaning, rejigging, moving and replanting your containers, wipe the edges then add a layer of potting grit or chipped bark to the compost surface. This will make them look really clean and fresh, and will also act as a weed suppressant.

10 THINGS TO PLANT IN POTS NOW

- **Alliums**
- **Crocuses**
- **Daffodils**
- **Holly** – or other seasonal feature plants
- **Irises** – Dutch or reticulated
- **Muelenbeckia** – to spill over the edges of pots
- **Rosemary** – it's evergreen and will also flower in spring
- **Tulips**
- ***Viburnum opulus*** or ***V. tinus*** – both offer winter berries
- ***V. bodnantense*** – for fragrant winter flowers. Give it a large pot

EASY TIDYING TASKS

As you've probably gathered, I love an autumn tidy-up. Since I leave border plants standing for as long as I can bear, having the rest of the garden clean and orderly offsets the wildness.

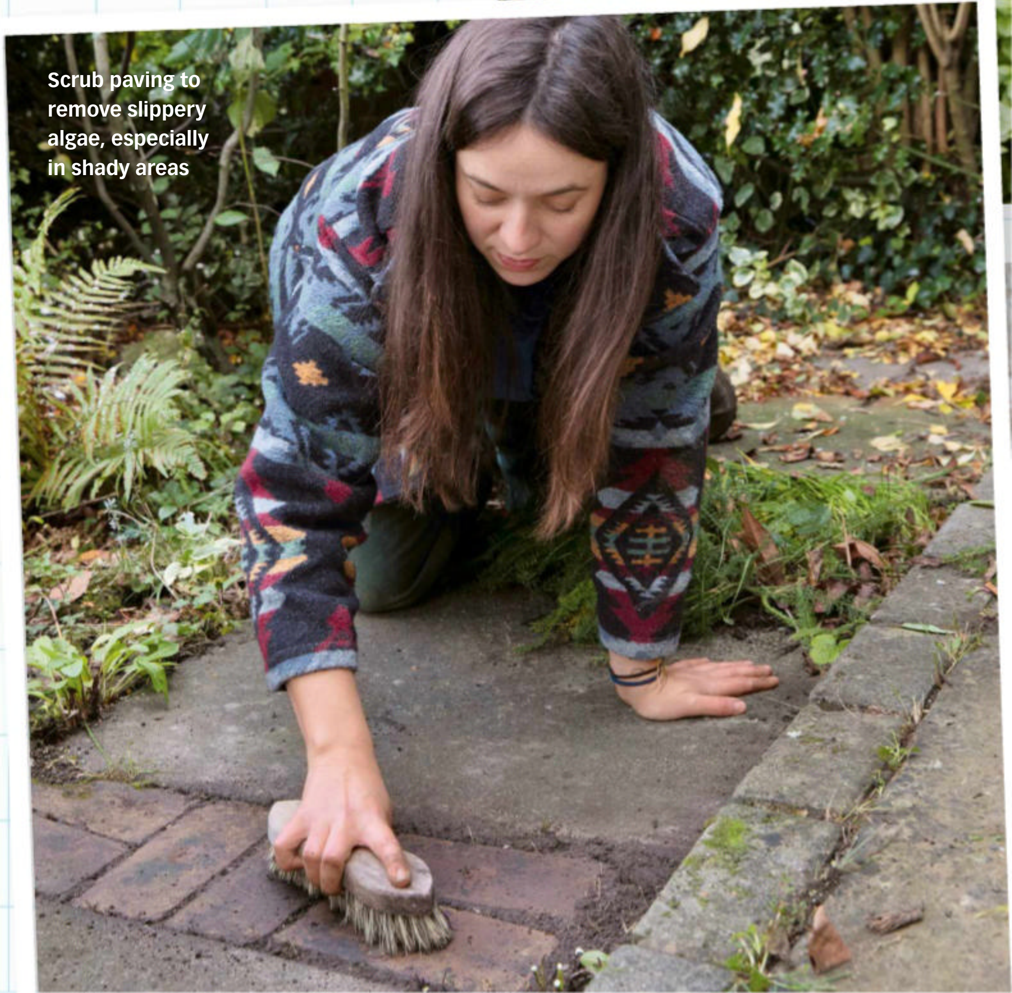
1 Empty the sludgy fallen leaves from ponds and bird baths. Also replace the water in bird baths to keep it clean and the birds healthy.

2 Sweep, wash down and use a stiff brush on patios and paths, otherwise algae and dirt can build up easily, discolour the patio and create a slippery surface.

3 Remove weeds and moss from gaps in paving, then sweep in some new sand on a dry day. There are special hook-shaped tools for this weeding, which make it much easier.

4 Collect, clean and save plant labels, ready to use again next year.

5 Look after your tools – collect them all up, then clean the blades and sharpen the edges, scrub the metal and wooden parts, oil the moving parts and wax or oil the wooden handles.



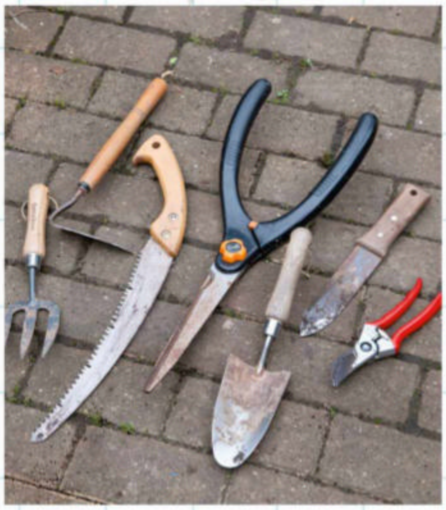
Scrub paving to remove slippery algae, especially in shady areas

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE

Trim back any overgrown herbs in pots, such as this straggly oregano

Hook out weeds that have seeded into the gaps between bricks and paving slabs

Clean out bird baths – remove fallen leaves and sludge, then refill with fresh water



Keep tools in good order by cleaning off any soil or plant residue and sharpening blades

NEXT TIME In January Frances will show you how to prepare for the new veg-growing year

Nick upcycles old materials where possible and turned an old wooden summerhouse into two new sheds

PHOTO: NEIL HEPWORTH

Starting over

Nick Bailey continues his garden transformation journey, with tips on choosing and positioning the key features

Part 2: How to create the backbone for a great garden

Once you've decided on the features you want, such as a shed, patio or screening, next consider the right site, style and materials for each

Several years ago I moved to a new home with a mature established garden. It had many good qualities but needed a major revamp in order to suit my needs.

In this three-part series, I'm sharing how I rethought my garden so you can do the same with yours. Breathing new life and style into an established plot is a relatively simple process, as long as you follow a logical set of steps.

Last month I started with an initial assessment of the site, so now I'm looking at choosing and positioning all the various elements that you might want in your garden, to ensure a cohesive, attractive and practical design.

No matter the shape or size of your garden, breaking it up into different spaces can make it feel bigger, more interesting, more alluring and more dynamic. Even just splitting a smaller space into two will add to its character. Dense vertical elements such as fences, trellis, hedges or walls are ideal for defining spaces, but it's also possible to partially visually divide spaces. For example, a simple row of timber posts or a pergola can create a sense of spatial division without fully blocking the view.

Careful positioning

The placement of the essential functional elements of your garden such as paths, walls, fences, pergolas and your greenhouse will determine how well the plot works. Place paths to link together the most-used elements, such as the house, greenhouse, shed and bin store, in the most practical, direct way – landscape architects call this following 'desire lines'. Also consider form and shape – these desire lines can be fulfilled with rectilinear, circular, wavy or gridded paths – it's down to you to pick which one works best.

The position of vertical elements such as fences, walls and pergolas will be driven by functions like screening, division, focus, protection and spatial definition. But when it comes to placing a greenhouse, for me only one way will do – south facing, with as much light as you can muster.

Choosing materials

Ideally your garden will feel like an extension of your home and vice versa. The simplest way to do this is to repeat

the materials your house is made of in the garden. A 1980s red-brick house with mock-Tudor timber detailing could see its materials either repeated in the garden or their colours replicated. Or why not go for contrast and pair the red brick with a buff-coloured stone slab or gravel?

Coping with levels

Having different levels in a garden can be challenging, but offers the advantage of helping you define different spaces. I have stepped my garden up from front to back, with four on-edge railway sleepers used as steps to gradually rise the required 80cm. On a steeper site, it would be worth adopting a cut-and-fill technique, where land from a higher area is removed and added to a lower area. Or get creative and stagger your garden to create interesting levels.

If you have good DIY skills, you should be able to construct a greenhouse yourself

Adding a greenhouse

Greenhouses are best positioned in a sunny, sheltered location, on firm, level ground, ideally near the house so you can access it easily

A greenhouse is a game-changer – it gives you protected growing space for bedding plants, tender ornamentals and edibles such as tomatoes and melons. It also provides a wet-weather retreat, useful storage area and potential focal point. I also use mine as a spring and autumn conservatory to make the most of the early and late sunshine.

You can spend tens of thousands on a glasshouse or just a few hundred – most plants won't know the difference! Mine cost just over £900 for a fairly large 3.6m x 2.4m aluminum unit, but a more typical compact greenhouse of 1.8m x 1.2m will set you back around £300. Alternatively, search for giveaways online or in local newspapers – the deal is usually that you'll need to deconstruct it yourself. I've previously acquired two greenhouses this way, and rebuilding them is usually easier than you might think.

I built my current greenhouse over a couple of weekends, starting with the base. You can approach this in many ways. Some people opt for a concrete slab just larger than the greenhouse itself, others for a narrow concrete foundation then a low brick wall on which to mount the structure. Both of these approaches are often best carried out by contractors. However, the simplest technique and the one I've used in my garden is cedar sleepers on a levelled sand base. Its inexpensive and requires minimal skills or tools to do it. I simply levelled the sleepers, bolted them together then screwed the glasshouse down on top.

> “The way you style, shape and paint the structures helps define how the garden feels”

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH

Nick included a pond in his GW Live show garden to bring a tranquil feel and attract wildlife

Make use of dug-up rubble or stones as a base layer for new paths, compacting it firmly

Consider key features

Focal points are essential elements in any garden. Placing an object at the end of a path or partly obscured in some planting in the distance will lead both your eye and your feet. And don't forget about those views beyond your garden, which might be worth 'borrowing'.

Plants take centre stage in the garden for me, but they also act as framing devices for other elements of the plot, such as a seating area or pond. Water brings additional light, movement, sound and, importantly, wildlife into the garden, and can be added in many imaginative styles and forms, on a large or small scale. Options include a raised pond, an urn water feature, a rill, a wall-mounted fountain or a barrel pond.

Add personality

Make the most of the functional elements of your plot, such as arches, fences, pergolas or a summerhouse. The way you choose to style, shape and paint these structures will really help define how the garden feels. ☐

Material matters

- **Consider sustainability** when choosing which materials to use, in addition to the style, feeling and vibe they create. Concrete and concrete-based materials such as paving slabs and block paving tend to have a large carbon footprint, as production methods are energy intensive. Materials that are shipped great distances, such as Indian stone, may also be considered less sustainable. That said, there are many materials that have a low environmental impact, including local stone or gravel, clay paving, bamboo cladding and local timber.

- **Balance the cost, quality and longevity** of materials. For example, inexpensive and untreated pine can be a tempting option, but it may soon need replacing so can potentially cost more in the end. Better to go for a high-quality oak or western red cedar. Equally, cheap terracotta pots can seem like a bargain until they shatter in their first winter. Instead, perhaps opt for fewer, but choose slightly more costly frost-proof pots. With hard surfacing, a rough guide to cost starts with gravel as the cheapest, followed by basic concrete slabs and block paving, next highest is clay paving, ceramic tiles and decking, with natural UK stone, such as York or Portland, coming in as the most costly. The majority of these materials will last decades, although decking, even if well treated, has a relatively short life span.

- **Try to upcycle** what you already have on site. I reused old bricks (as paving), a wooden summerhouse (to make two new sheds), clay border edgers (as a greenhouse raised bed), the slabs under the summerhouse (for the greenhouse floor) and small stones from preparing soil (as a path foundation). Also try sourcing free materials – slabs, timber and block paving are often given away online if you collect them.

- **Be creative** – even basic materials can be used in inventive ways to add interest. Just flipping the direction that square slabs are laid and running them in a diamond pattern changes their feel entirely, or how about framing square slabs with a grid of basic bricks? Play with your materials and the dynamic ways they can be used.

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

NEXT MONTH In the final part of the series Nick adds the all-important finishing touch: the plants

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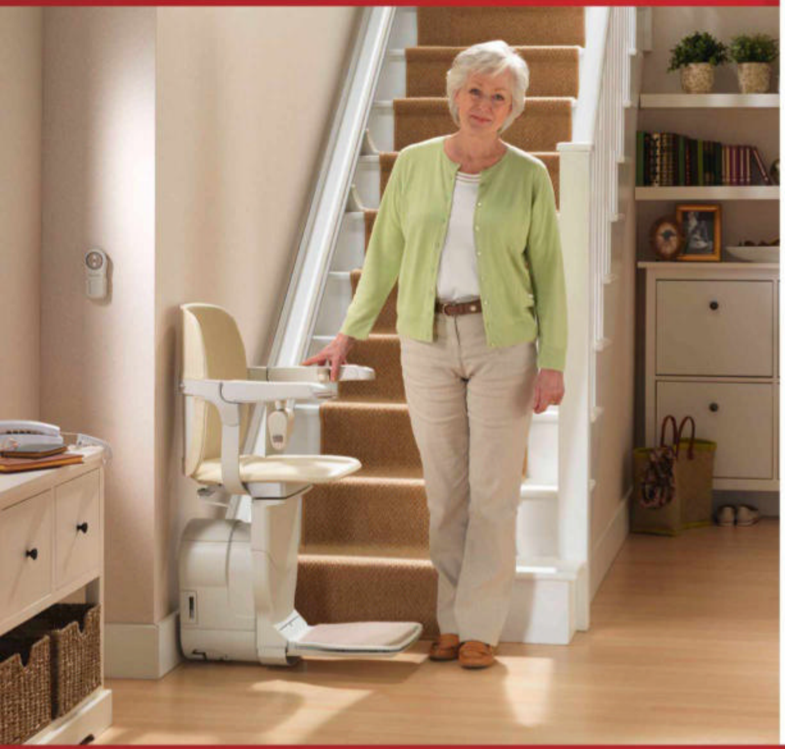

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Homegrown CHRISTMAS

Discover 22 pages of festive inspiration for your garden and home

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From holly and ivy to berries and blooms, Carol helps you keep your garden full of colour

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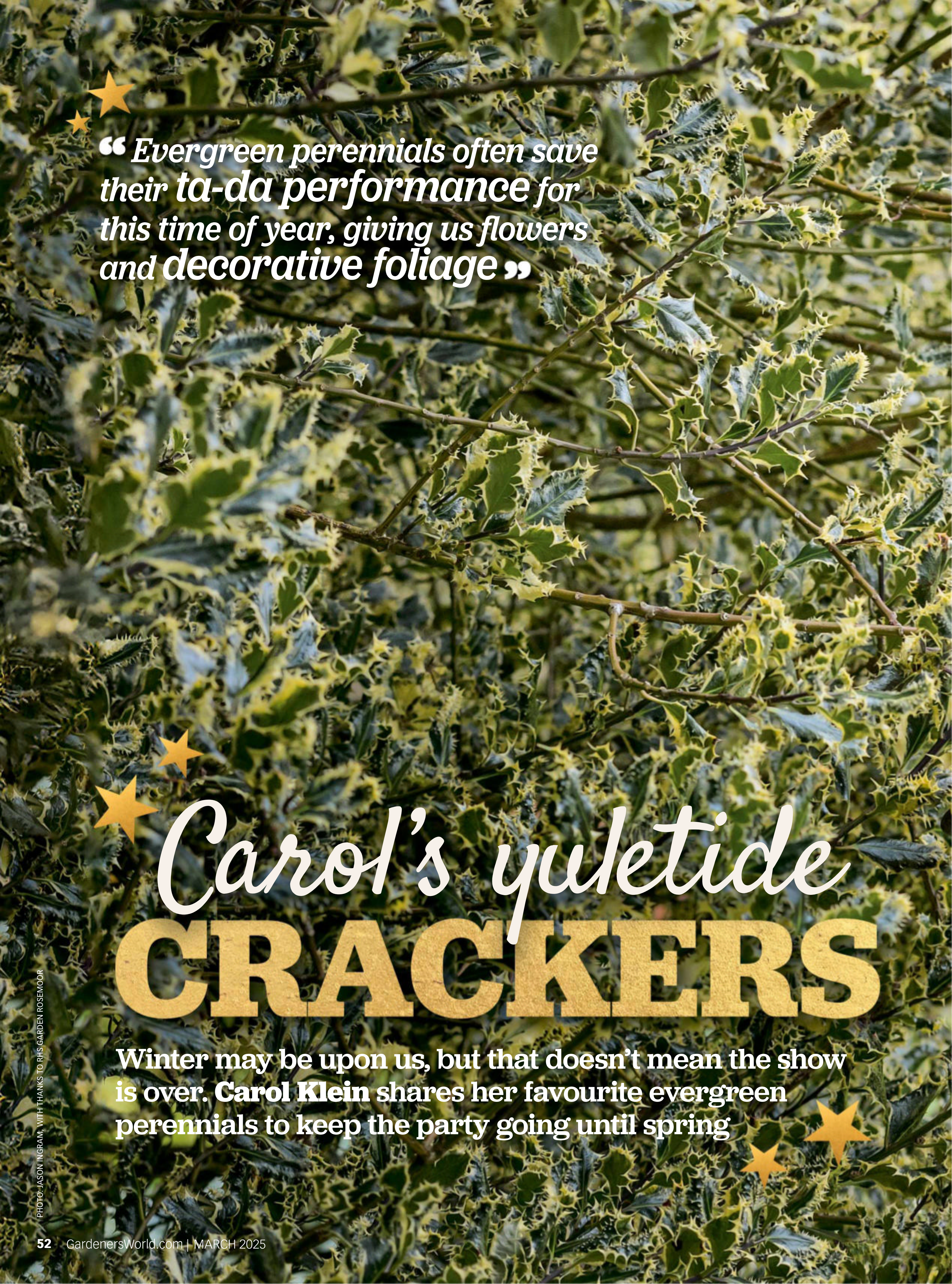
PHOTO: NEIL HEPWORTH



> “Evergreen perennials often save their **ta-da performance** for this time of year, giving us flowers and **decorative foliage**”

Carol’s yuletide CRACKERS

Winter may be upon us, but that doesn’t mean the show is over. **Carol Klein** shares her favourite evergreen perennials to keep the party going until spring

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM, WITH THANKS TO RHS GARDEN ROSEMOOR

Carol takes a few stems of the variegated holly 'Ferox Argentea', perfect for adding to indoor Christmas displays

Once upon a time, most gardeners would start the process of 'putting their gardens to bed' in September. It was as though the garden had no importance; in fact, it disappeared from view for half the autumn, the entire winter and a large chunk of the next year's spring. Gardening would recommence in April, a bit earlier if you had a greenhouse. Soil might have been turned over in the vegetable garden to let the frost do its work, but as for finding joy and beauty in the winter garden, that was something few gardeners strived to create.

But times change. The ethos of gardens, what they are and who they are for, has moved on. I don't know about you but I want to know and enjoy my garden throughout the entire year and to celebrate what each season has to offer.

Some of my favourite shrubs are at their best at this time of year. You may have picked up on how much I love herbaceous perennials. In winter, though, most of them are invisible – all their activity is underground, gathering strength and energy from the soil through their roots to make next year's flowers and leaves. But this provides a window to delight in evergreen perennials, the plants whose time is now. They make this season so special and, because there are fewer plants doing their thing in winter, we can study, observe and enjoy these very special plants.

Evergreen perennials often save their 'ta-da' performance for this time of year, winter-flowering shrubs giving us flowers and decorative foliage for our garden and, in many cases, for our Christmas decorations. All evergreens were once valued as providing a living link between one year and the next, positive proof that the dreary, bleak cold of winter would not last forever,

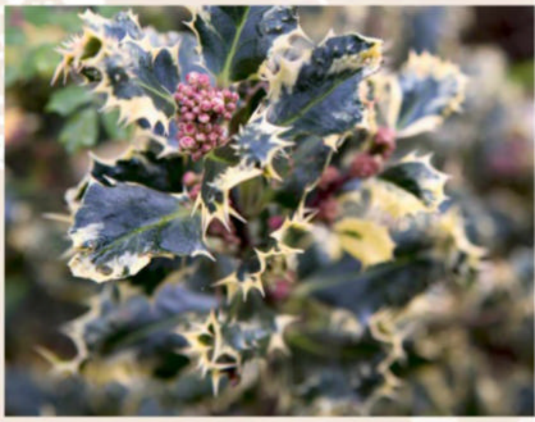
Ornamental grasses look stunning with a sparkling coat of winter frost

PHOTOS: ALAMY/AVALON.RED, RM FLORAL; SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM, WITH THANKS TO ASHWOOD NURSERIES AND RHS GARDEN ROSEMOOR

MY FAVOURITE *winter plants*

▷ *Ilex aquifolium* 'Ferox Argentea'

At home in a small garden due to its slow growth and fairly compact, this male holly (useful if you have a female around that needs pollinating to produce berries) has real presence. Its leaves are super-spiky giving it the nickname of hedgehog holly – there are even spikes on the surface of the leaves. Its silver edges and interesting texture make it a prime candidate for Christmas arrangements. Just remember to wear gloves when harvesting!

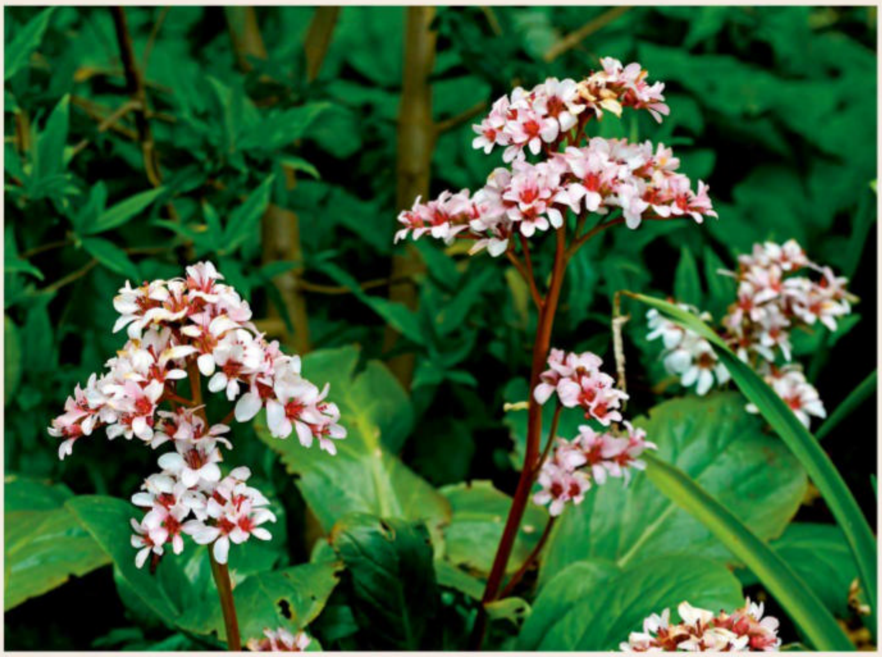


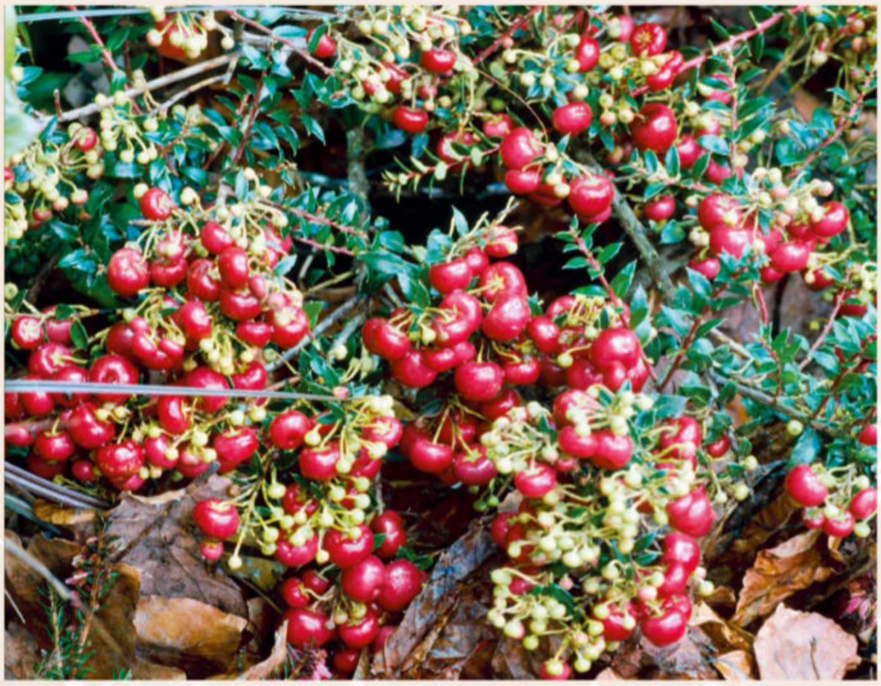
◁ *Helleborus* x *hybridus* Anemone Yellow Shades

Winter and early spring are showtime for hellebores and though some species, such as the Lenten rose, may not be in flower for Christmas, their new palmate leaves (produced after the sensible practice of removing old leaves in late autumn) will be looking handsome and the buds that will open to provide a glowing display already evident. This recent development, after decades of breeding, has glorious golden-yellow flowers, sometimes with yellow nectaries too, a warm and uplifting contribution to the wintry scene.

▽ *Bergenia* 'Beethoven'

Since it shed its gloomy image associated with dark, dismal Victorian shrubberies, and assumed its rightful role as a useful, tolerant and beautiful plant, the bergenia is now widely used. Its fame has spread thanks to plaudits from great gardeners such as Beth Chatto, who also demonstrated its versatility by including several varieties in her gravel garden. As well as having pale-pink flowers with dark centres (much easier to combine than varieties with puce flowers), its handsome leaves become beetroot-red in cold spells.

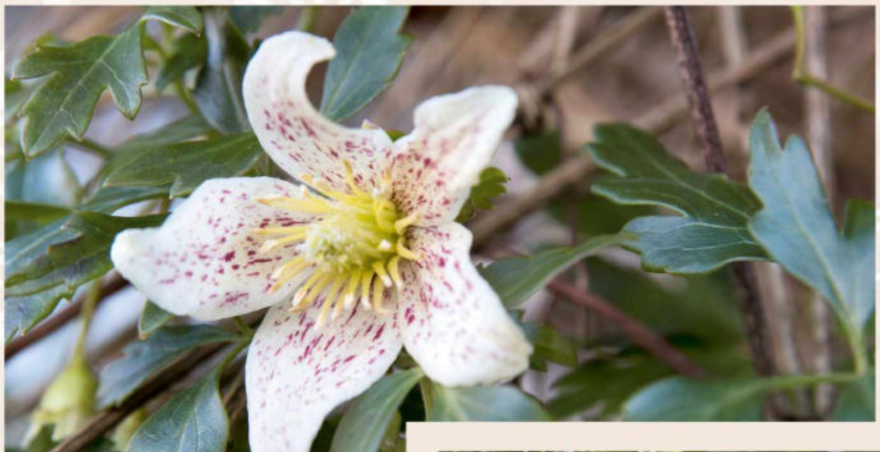




◁ *Gaultheria mucronata* 'Bell's Seedling'

One of my favourite Christmas shrubs with shiny, sharp, dark-green leaves and masses of pink berries in clusters. In the main, gaultherias are dioecious, having male and female flowers on separate plants. This variety is self-fertile and can also pollinate female plants. It needs acid soil but can be grown in containers with ericaceous compost.

I love it also for its association with Christmas and particularly with my family. One ritual was for me and my mum to go up to The Chinese Gardens at Rivington Pike, before they were restored, to gather evergreens including gaultheria (or pernettya as it was known then) and then rush home to arrange them for the Christmas table in the warm, cosy dining room with all the family around to admire the scene.

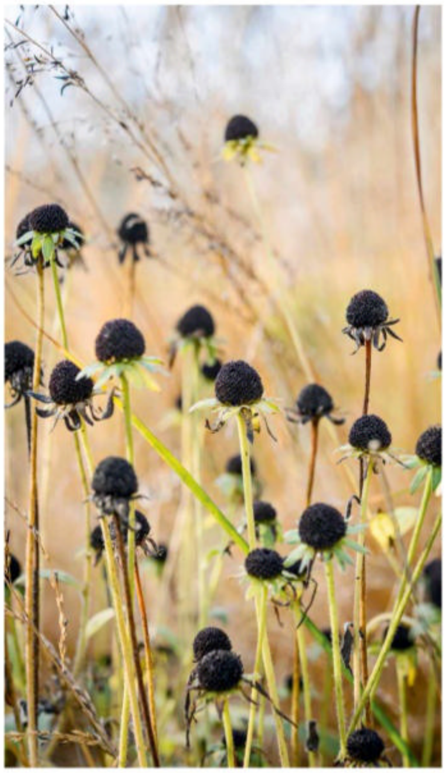


▷ *Clematis cirrhosa* 'Freckles'

A clematis in mid-winter? Given a sheltered spot, preferably in a sunny position, this pretty, sweetly scented clematis can be relied on to produce masses of its dainty, creamy-yellow flowers with crimson 'freckles' from November through to the following spring. Later flowers are often accompanied by silky seedheads, a glorious combination with its much-divided bronze-tinged leaves

▽ *Hedera helix*

The most important consideration when planting any form of common ivy is to ensure that it has something to climb up. It is only ascendant stems that produce flowers – thereby providing nectar for the second-generation, late-summer-autumn-hatching butterflies such as Red Admirals and Peacocks – and later, berries, an important and sustaining winter food source for garden birds. Their pollen and nectar are vital for many other insects too – ivy even has its own solitary bee, the Ivy Bee, of course!



***Rudbeckia fulgida*'s distinctive seedheads give winter interest and food for wildlife**

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE, WITH THANKS TO ROSE MCMONIGALL, DIPLEY MILL, HARTLEY WINTNEY, HOOK, HAMPSHIRE; JASON INGRAM

> " Our winter gardens can provide beauty and lift our spirits "

that despite bare branches and everything dying down, nature's life-blood still ran through the holly's veins.

Caring and sharing

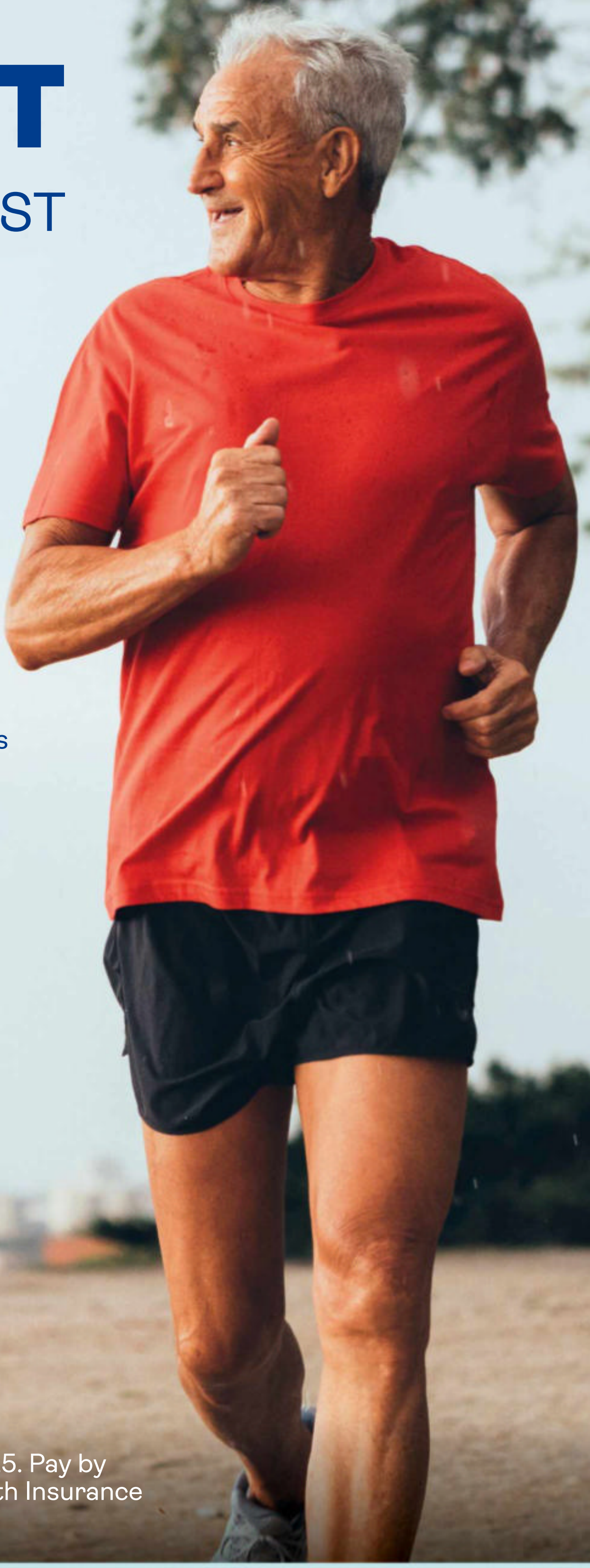
And I'm not just sitting back with a cuppa enjoying these blooms; I'm also getting stuck into tasks that need to be carried out to ensure that these plants put on a good show year after year, as well as preparing the garden for next year's growing season. After the long, 'droughty' spells of 2025, this is a good opportunity to mulch the ground with compost, leafmould, composted bark or any organic material that will retain moisture, suppress weeds, improve the texture of the soil and, in some cases, feed it.

Even now, there is still time to plant. On milder days, before the soil gets too cold, opportunities abound to introduce new plants, including bulbs. Tulips, for example, must have a period of cold if they are to flower well. The bulbs can be planted right up to Christmas, with a 10cm layer of soil over the top. If your soil, like that of Glebe Cottage, is on the heavy side, then planting them in pots may be the best proposition.

Early winter is also a great time to cut back dead straggly stems while leaving as many seedheads as possible for their beauty and, more importantly, as food for wildlife. Clumps of grasses offer important shelter for insects and small mammals. We are far more aware nowadays of how many creatures we share our space with.

Our winter gardens are an enormously important resource for birds, insects and small mammals, and alongside that, they can provide beauty and lift our spirits on even the coldest, dullest days. ☐

Listen to Carol's advice on gardening as you age in our Winter Conversations series at **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**



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> “We’re gifting the planet our care by celebrating Christmas in a more thoughtful and conscientious way”

Christmas PROJECTS

For a seasonal celebration with sustainability at its heart, create beautiful decorations that everyone will admire with plants foraged from your garden

WORDS HAZEL GARDINER **PHOTOS** NEIL HEPWORTH

There's something deeply joyful about creating your own festive wreath. Beyond the finished design, it's the gathering of materials and the act of making that brings a special sense of connection to the season. Each wreath becomes a reflection of where you live and what you love – whether that's branches gathered from your own garden, clippings of common species ethically foraged from public pathways or seasonal stems from your local florist. These natural decorations don't need to be complicated or costly to feel abundant and luxurious.

Simple handfuls of evergreens, berries or seedheads can be transformed into something beautiful for your door, table or mantel. By choosing what's at hand and in season, we're not only creating something unique, but we're also gifting the planet our care by celebrating Christmas in a more thoughtful and conscientious way.

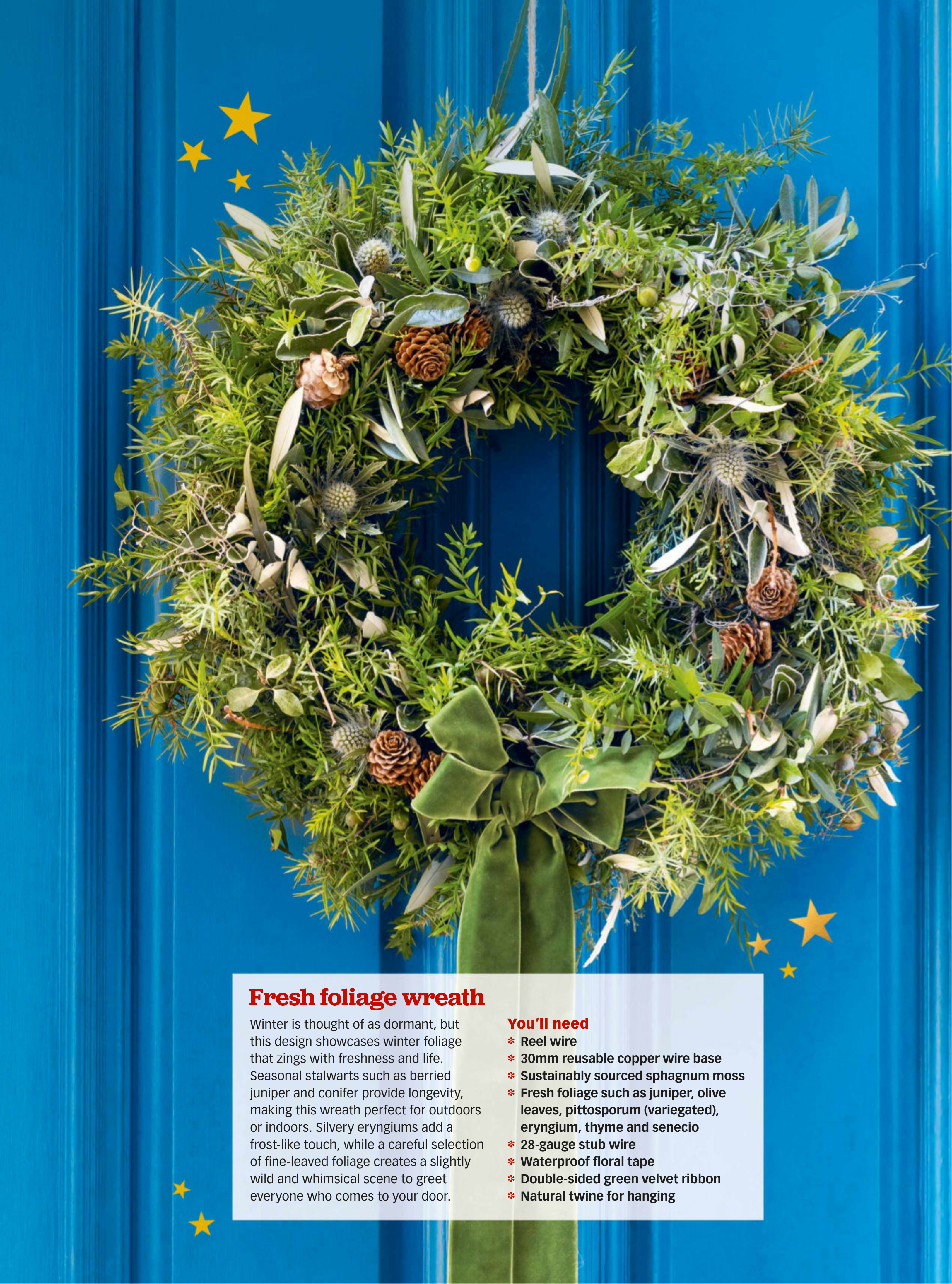
Jewel red wreath

Inspired by the deep hues of winter, this wreath layers both dried and fresh materials, amplifying richness and texture. Rosehips and hydrangeas in fresh and dried states contrast with vivid crab apples and dusky hips for a jewel-like glow. Shelter this wreath from wind and rain to preserve its freshness. *Hydrangea macrophylla* will dry in situ, so keep and reuse for future projects.

You'll need

- **Reel wire**
- **30mm reusable wire wreath base**
- **Sustainably sourced sphagnum moss**
- **Dry plant material such as *Hydrangea macrophylla*, larch cones, nigella seedheads and hops**
- **Fresh foliage such as eucalyptus, *Acacia baileyana*, alder catkins, cedar pine and crab apples**
- **28-gauge stub wire**
- **Waterproof floral tape**
- **Wide double-sided velvet ribbon**
- **Natural twine for hanging**

Hazel Gardiner is a floral designer, writer and broadcaster, and founder of a contemporary floral studio. **@hazelgardinerdesign**



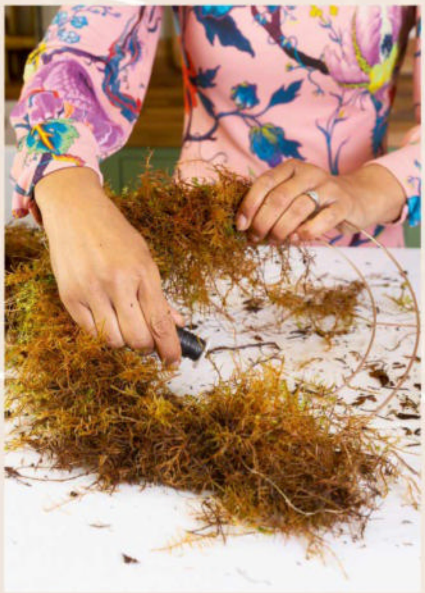
Fresh foliage wreath

Winter is thought of as dormant, but this design showcases winter foliage that zings with freshness and life. Seasonal stalwarts such as berried juniper and conifer provide longevity, making this wreath perfect for outdoors or indoors. Silvery eryngiums add a frost-like touch, while a careful selection of fine-leaved foliage creates a slightly wild and whimsical scene to greet everyone who comes to your door.

You'll need

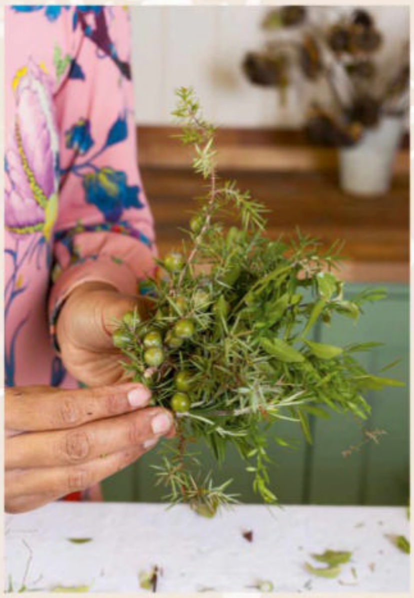
- **Reel wire**
- **30mm reusable copper wire base**
- **Sustainably sourced sphagnum moss**
- **Fresh foliage such as juniper, olive leaves, pittosporum (variegated), eryngium, thyme and senecio**
- **28-gauge stub wire**
- **Waterproof floral tape**
- **Double-sided green velvet ribbon**
- **Natural twine for hanging**

CREATE YOUR wreath



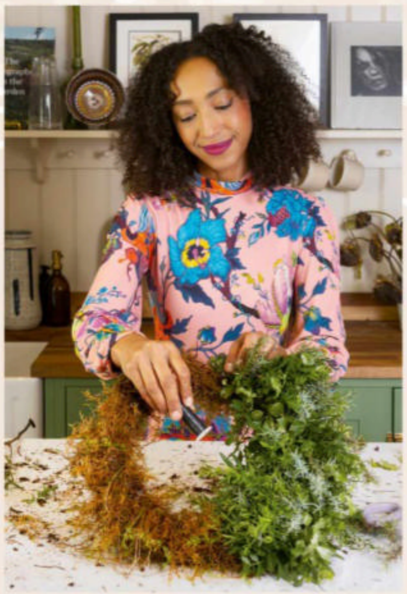
Prep base

1 **Attach the reel wire securely** to the wreath base, on the spool. Loop an 8cm piece over the base and twist back onto itself. Cover the base with sphagnum moss, and secure it by looping the wire around the base and the moss every 2.5cm.



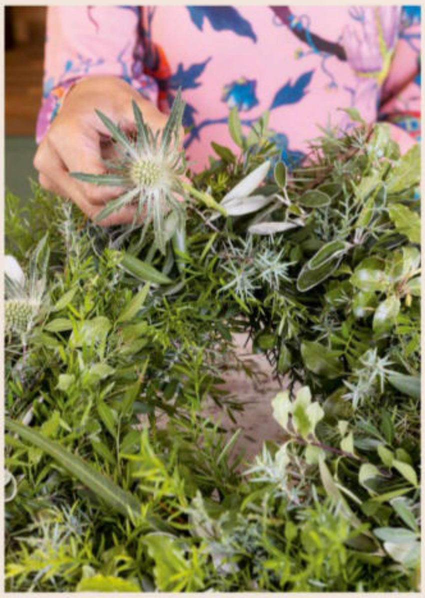
Prep bundles

2 **Sort ingredients by variety,** grouping fresh and dried, and by colour and texture. Create small bundles with the hardy foliage. Place the longer stems to the back, the shorter stems to the front, fanning them out. Strip the lower leaves for easier wiring.



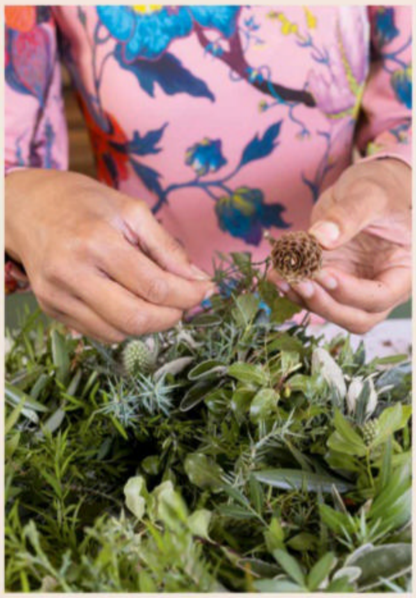
Attach bundles

3 **Lay the first bundle on the wreath** at an angle, following the curve of the base. Secure to the base by wrapping two loops of wire around the end of the bundle. Avoid pulling too tightly but ensure it is tight enough so that each bundle feels secure.



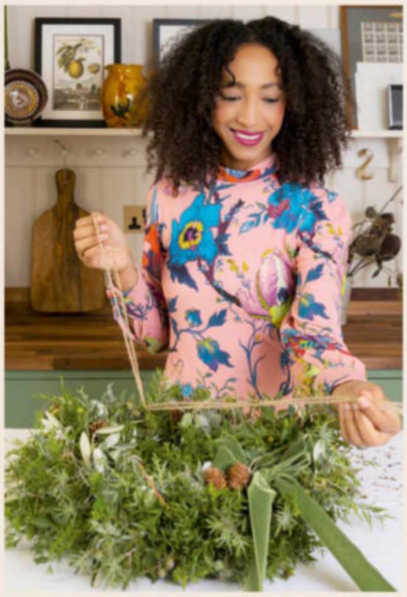
Build your wreath

4 **Continue adding the bundles,** overlapping each to cover the stems of the one before. Work clockwise in a zigzag, until the wreath looks full. Pause regularly to check symmetry, adjusting the bundles to ensure that all ingredients remain visible.



Wiring details

5 **Wire delicate elements such as** hops, or heavier accents such as berries, individually for stability. Attach stems to stub wire and wrap with floral tape. Add these while building or when complete to highlight texture and achieve a balanced design.



Finishing touches

6 **Attach a beautiful velvet ribbon** or strip of fabric like satin for a final decorative touch. Tie it into a large simple bow. Thread some twine through the back of the bow and attach it to the wreath, knotting it securely in place at the back.

Napkin rings

These delicate handmade napkin rings bring a colourful, personal touch to your table. Perfect for festive gatherings, dinner parties or everyday styling, they add charm to each place setting and can be customised with ribbons or personalised name tags.

You'll need

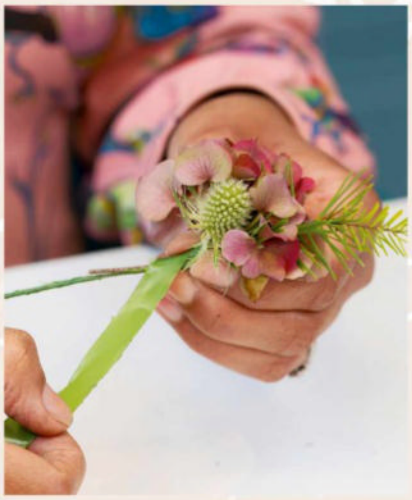
- **28-gauge stub wire**
- **Waterproof floral tape**
- **Fresh plant material such as Douglas fir, *Hydrangea macrophylla*, rosehips and eryngium**
- **Satin ribbon**

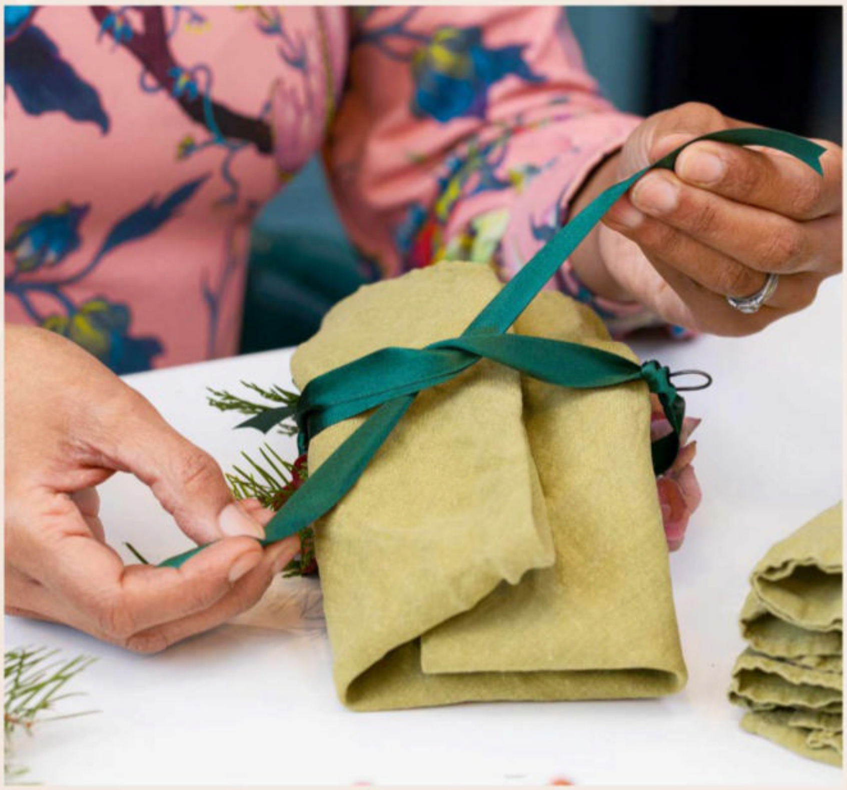
HOW TO MAKE

1 **Cover a length of gauge stub** wire with the floral tape, pulling and twisting as you go. Bend each end into a small loop.

2 **Gather the fresh ingredients** into bundles (around 5cm long and secure them to the wire with floral tape, starting underneath the first loop and finishing before the last.

3 **Thread the satin ribbon** through the loops, gently bending the wire around your napkin. To finish, tie the ribbon into a bow and secure.





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> “Perfect for festive gatherings, handmade napkin rings add charm to each place setting”

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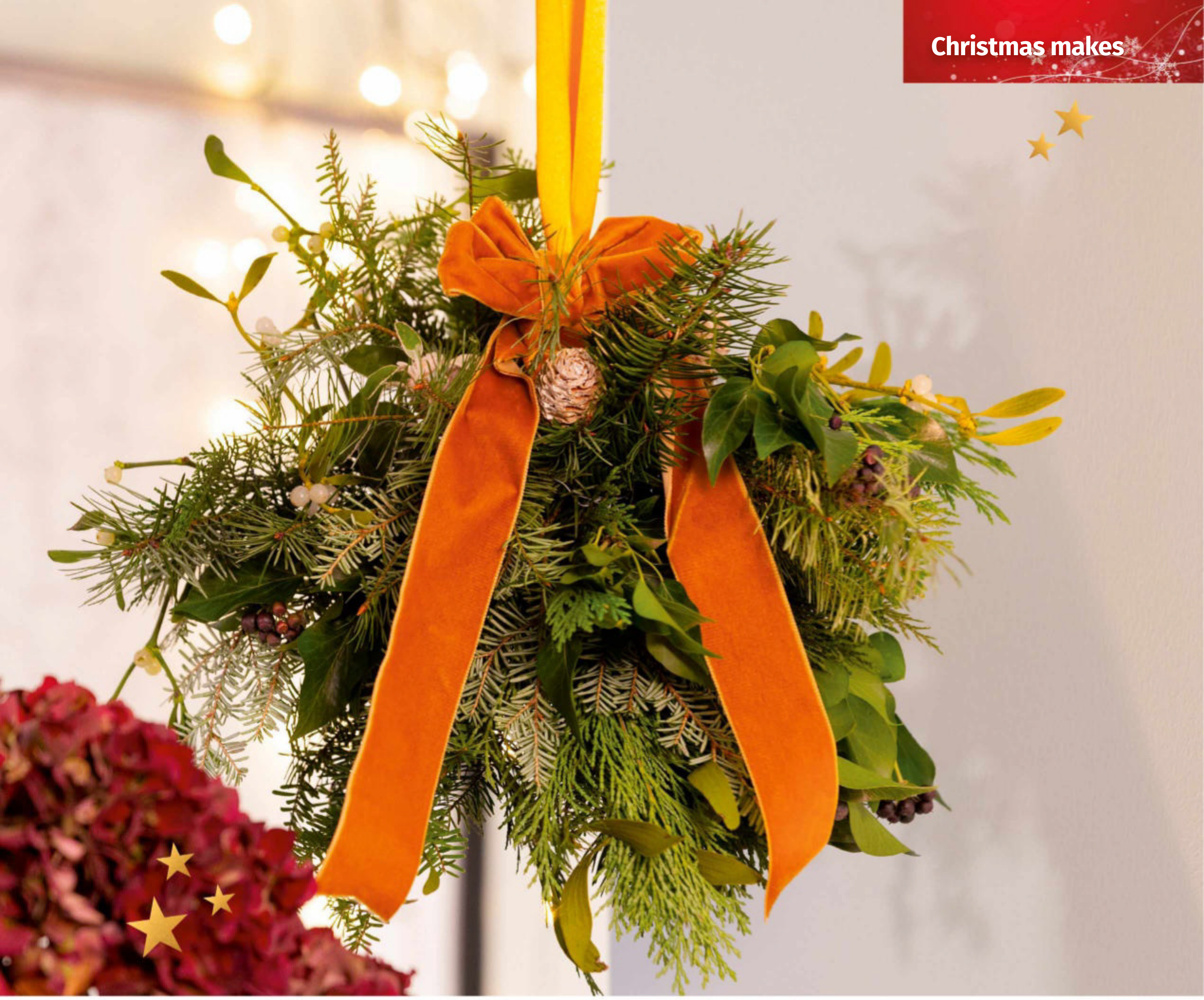

Hanging bauble

A playful hanging decoration incorporating symbolic mistletoe, this ball will add a charming touch to hallways or doors. It is filled with seasonal greenery, berries and pine cones, ingredients that can be composted and the wire mechanics reused.

You'll need

- Chicken wire
- Reel wire
- Satin ribbon
- Fresh plant material such as Douglas fir, conifer, berried myrtle, pine cones and mistletoe
- Velvet ribbon
- 28-gauge stub wire

Tree alternative: **a hanging bauble is a great festive option if space is too tight for a tree**

HOW TO MAKE

1 **Create a chicken-wire ball** and secure it with reel wire. Attach a satin ribbon at the top to provide a hanging loop.

2 **Insert stems of contrasting** hardy evergreens and foliage. Build up the layers, using shorter lengths at the top and bottom to maintain the circular shape.

3 **Once fully covered, add** mistletoe and contrasting elements such as berries, pine cones and twigs with reel wire.

4 **Attach the velvet ribbon at** the top, close to the satin ribbon, using stub wire. Tie in a bow.

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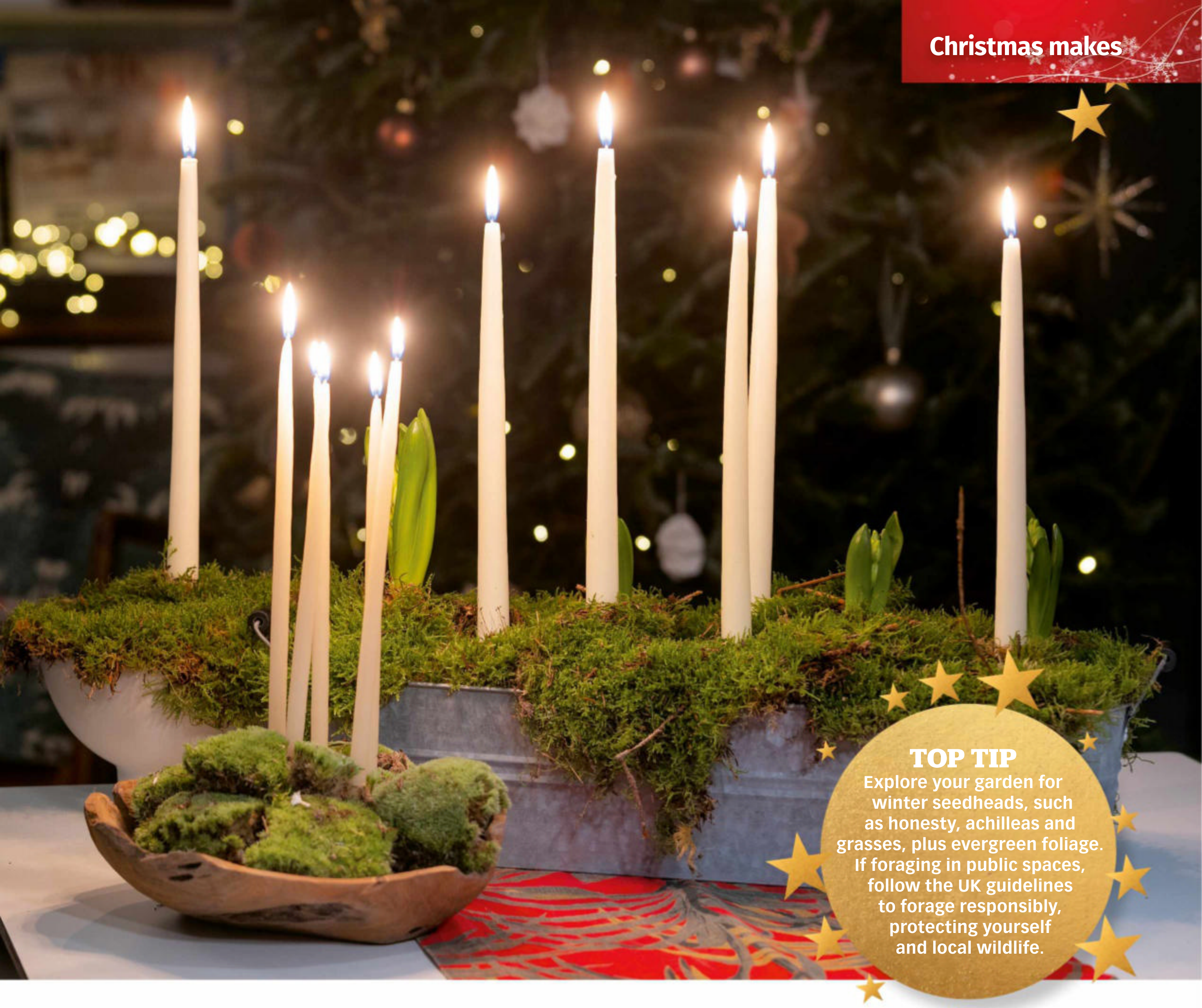

TOP TIP

Explore your garden for winter seedheads, such as honesty, achilleas and grasses, plus evergreen foliage. If foraging in public spaces, follow the UK guidelines to forage responsibly, protecting yourself and local wildlife.

Candles and greenery

This zinc planter arrangement makes a versatile centrepiece for a table or windowsill. Combining sustainably sourced flat or bun moss with fragrant hyacinth bulbs and glowing candlelight, it creates a display that looks and smells beautiful, and could be adapted to suit any containers you have to hand. Afterwards, plant the hyacinths outdoors or gift them if you don't have space.

You'll need

- **LED or wax tapered candles**
- **Small candleholders, pots or jars**
- **Zinc planter**
- **Floral tack (a soft, sticky putty)**
- **Potted hyacinths**
- **Chicken wire**
- **Small stones or pebbles**
- **Sustainably sourced flat or bun moss**

HOW TO MAKE

1 **Place each candle in a small** pot or jar (I used little jam jars) and secure in the zinc planter with floral tack, leaving spaces for the potted hyacinths.

2 **Add chicken wire around the** candles for stability and structure; for smaller containers without bulbs, use small stones or pebbles.

3 **Position the potted hyacinths** into the chicken wire, padding out any gaps with stones or pebbles.

4 **Cover with more stones or** pebbles, then drape the moss over the top. Switch on or light the candles.

FALDEO
BRUT
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Get festive WITH ADAM

This Yuletide, enjoy sharing a host of seasonal treats from your garden – from homemade preserves, foraged decor and warming teas to the ultimate berry-infused glass of fizz. Cheers from **Adam, Buster** and the **Frost family**!

PHOTO: JASON INGRAM

I really enjoy the pace of the garden in winter. Yes, there are things to do but it never feels rushed, and with my busy work schedule it's the only time I can have two full weeks at home. Mrs Frost loves Christmas too, so we do like to go to town. I'm at my happiest spending time in the kitchen with music on, family in and out, and Islay, our labrador, for company. This year of course we'll also have Buster in the mix, which will be interesting!

You may be surprised to hear that we also like a little drink at Christmas – in fact, now the kids are older we've got into the habit of making early-evening cocktails, either on Christmas Day or Boxing Day, or both. It's great fun to see whose looks – and of course tastes – the best, plus to have homegrown ingredients is an added bonus.

Earlier in the year we make herb syrups and liqueurs to flavour gin, vodka or even whiskey, in addition to our usual chutneys, jams and herbal oils and teas. If you enjoy homemade goodies from the garden, it's the perfect way to make the most of your summer fruit. And if you haven't grown your own this year and fancy a go, just start putting some thought into what you might want to make in the run-up to next Christmas, which is a great way to start thinking ahead for the following growing year. I promise you will not regret it.

Plus, never worry about gluts – there's always a way you can use them, so before we get stuck into some of my favourite homemade festive treats, let's all raise an al fresco toast to that!

ABOVE **Adam and Buster are looking forward to a happy Christmas, celebrating with homegrown bounty from the garden**

> “Bringing my Christmas veg to the table is one of the proudest moments of my year”

Adam uses his garden produce to prepare festive gifts and treats through autumn

Frost family treats

Greening up the house is important and especially so at Christmas, but with the kids now older, choosing the tree is more of a Mr and Mrs thing. For me the tree must be fresh (that smell!), with roots if possible, and we’re very lucky to have a couple of really good tree growers near us. Once home, I trim off the lower branches to use as the backbone for our Christmas decor, adding yew, rosemary, flowering winter box, and berries and seedheads that have been dried from late summer.

We tend to create small greenscapes that look great along sideboards, tables and windowsills, plus a lovely central display down the Christmas table. In recent years, Mrs Frost has even taken to wrapping my three pear trees in the front garden with lights, which to be fair are the shape of Christmas trees, and do look a picture when you walk up to the house.

Preserving memories

After the green stuff is sorted, it’s all about what we can eat or drink of course, and at this point the grown-up children are more than happy to get involved.

In reality, the planning starts in late summer, which brings back one of my first Christmas memories – helping ‘Tidy Nan’ with her runner-bean chutney, ready to pair with cheese over the festive period. We would walk up to the allotment and pick a good bag of beans, then Nan would set everything up on the table and we’d get to work. She would top and tail them, then I would be tasked with slicing – pushing and pulling what was needed for the chutney though one of those little plastic slicers (which I think you can still get). Then Nan would blanch any extras and freeze them for use over winter.

Even when she got older, moved to Devon and stopped making chutney every time I visited, she still made sure she had a homemade jar of the stuff, bought from someone in the village. I loved it so much that I still make it occasionally (the recipe is in my *How I Garden* book if you’re looking for a Christmas gift!), although I spice mine up a little. Other great combos include gooseberry and elderflower chutney, while foraged blackberry jelly makes a great alternative to the usual cranberry.

When I’m sat enjoying a little cheese and chutney, I aways think about my Nan. And maybe that’s what it’s all about for me – making things, sharing them with friends and family, and then passing it on.

Gifts from the herb patch

If I could only grow one thing in my garden, it would be herbs – they provide us with so much value, whether fresh or dried, for use in herbal teas (fennel, lemon verbena and elderberry are some of my favourites) or in cooking, or just simply there for their beauty. If you grow the tougher evergreens, you’ll have fresh herbs on hand to help flavour your Christmas dinner too. There’s something lovely about popping out with the scissors on Christmas morning to cut what you need, plus Mrs frost loves to dry, tie and hang them on display. Rosemary, sage and thyme, added to roast potatoes, carrots and parsnips, really do become the stars of the show.

Making homemade herb oils is good fun too and so easy, for adding flavour to dishes or breads, or gifted to your nearest and dearest. I use a good extra virgin olive oil infused with a single herb or I mix a few together to create more of a blend. One of my favourites is rosemary oil, which I sometimes add garlic to, but to be honest you can use whatever you like. Just make sure you wash the herbs thoroughly and sterilise that airtight bottle or jar, and store in a cool, dry place.

Homemade chutney paired with cheeses is ideal for sharing around the festive table

You can use various herbs to make flavoured oils, but rosemary is one of Adam’s favourites

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

Making blackberry liqueur is a fun job and a great way to use up any excess harvests

A homegrown herbal tea makes a lovely warming drink on a chilly winter day

A berry merry Christmas

There are plenty of other festive treats growing in my front garden, including fruits and berries – and this summer we got too many to store. So we've started making spiced pear gin, which is a warming treat for the colder months, and we used the blackberries to make cassis, which is a bit like sloe gin really – and lovely in a little sparkling for that Christmas day toast. It's also great in cocktails or at the end of a long day, shared with a loved one as you sit around the fire.

It's so easy to make too. After picking your blackberries, rinse them and leave to dry, removing any bits of stem or anything discoloured or damaged. Then put the fruit into a sterilised, lidded, airtight jar, add some caster sugar and top up with vodka (or brandy). Seal the lid, give the jar a good shake, then put it in a cool, dark place. Give it another shake every few days – a lovely ritual in the run-up to the festive period.

It will be ready in about a month, or you could keep the fruit in for a couple more months if you want a stronger flavour, but I wouldn't leave it in any longer than that. Then I give it a little taste, before straining it through a fine-mesh cloth and chucking the spent fruit on the compost pile. The lovely ruby berry liquid is now ready to decant into a sterilised bottle or back into the original jar after giving it a good clean.

And the best way to enjoy it? Pour some into your favourite flute, top up with sparkling and add a plump blackberry as a garnish (a frozen one is fine), then take outside to toast the fruits of the garden!

THINKING AHEAD TO THE *festive table*

Once you have all those extra bits sorted, what about the veg for your festive meal? For me, growing as much of my Christmas veg as possible, then cooking it and bringing it to the table, is probably one of the proudest moments of my year. Here are a few that are not only simple, but are winners on the big day, too. Yuletide is also the perfect time to plan ahead for the next growing year if you didn't manage to get a homegrown feast on the table this time

Kalettes

Main-crop potatoes

Parsnips

Carrots

Kalettes

I started growing this tasty and highly nutritious veg – a cross between Brussels sprouts and kale – a few years ago. To explain the flavour, think spring greens, and they're heavenly steamed, tossed in butter and finished with a little Parmesan cheese (or a lot if you're my son, Oakley!). You can grow kalettes from seed, but I tend to buy plugs, planting them 60cm apart, with the same between rows. Firm the young plants in well and cover with fine netting to protect from caterpillars and pigeons. Kalettes have a long cropping period throughout winter, provide great structure and could even be interplanted in a border.

Potatoes

I love roast potatoes, cooked with sage and garlic. I harvest them as main-crop potatoes from August to October, when the leaves on the plants have turned yellow and died down. I then wash and dry my best potatoes (with no signs of bruising or pest damage), and store them in a large paper bag to enjoy through winter.

Main-crop varieties are the last ones to be planted, usually in April or May. Choose an open, sunny site, dig in well-rotted organic matter and space the tubers 40cm apart, in rows nearly double that distance apart. As the foliage emerges, keep earthing up the plants until a good ridge forms. Water well in dry spells.

Parsnips

Christmas dinner without parsnips? I think Mrs Frost would leave me! We have ours roasted with rosemary and finished with maple syrup. Parsnips are easy to grow, but be sure to use fresh seeds and give them plenty of time to reach a good size.

I sow direct in spring into well-prepared soil – light, sandy soil is best but make sure the seedlings don't dry out once germinated (which can take up to a month). When the seedlings get to about 10cm tall, thin out if needed.

For the best flavour, harvest after the first frosts. As long as the soil doesn't get too wet, I just leave mine in the ground until I'm ready to cook them.

Carrots

I love growing mixed-coloured carrots, not for any other reason than because they look great on table, especially roasted with thyme and finished with honey.

All homegrown carrots have plenty of flavour and are straightforward to grow from early spring right through to late August. My soil is a little heavy, so I grow my carrots in raised beds filled with light, fertile soil, which provides good drainage. If you work out where you're going to sow, you can prepare the bed now. Carrot seeds should germinate within a couple of weeks. Thin out the weaker seedlings and, once established, only water during dry spells.

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH

Listen to Adam Frost in our Conversations podcast series as he shares his passion for growing and cooking from his plot, plus offers garden design advice and much more – go to **GardenersWorld.com/podcast**

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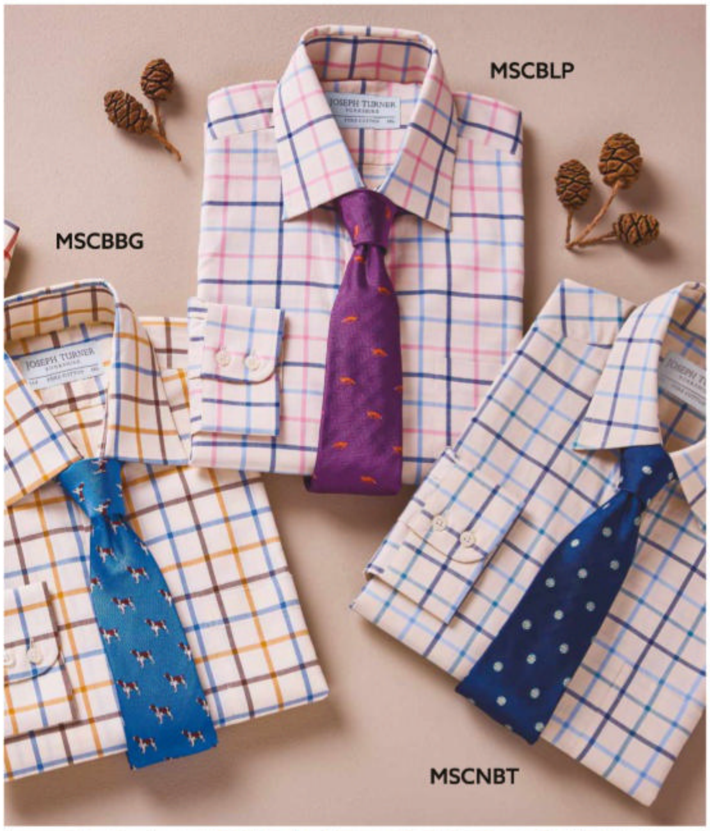
YORKSHIRE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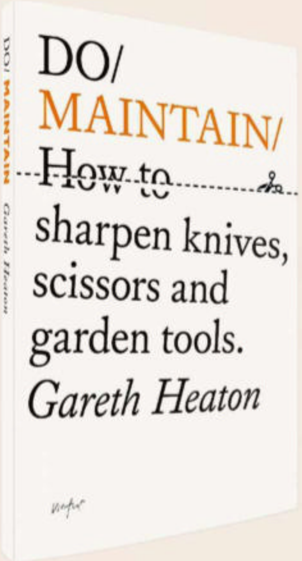
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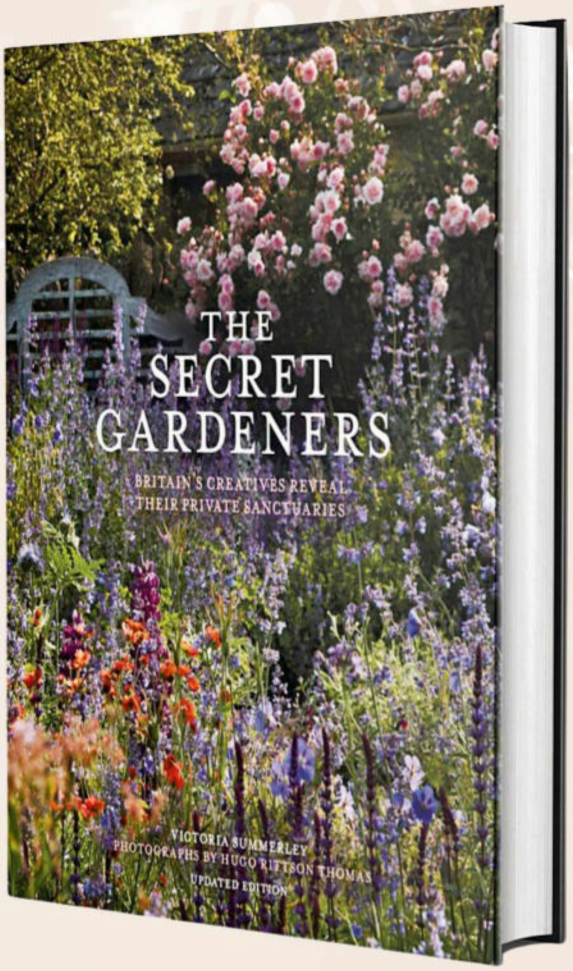
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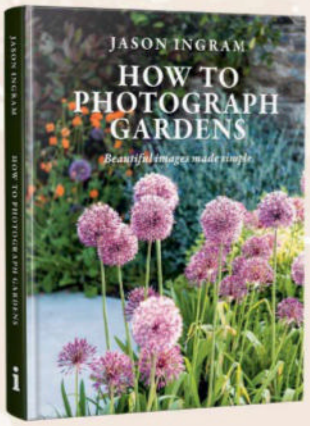
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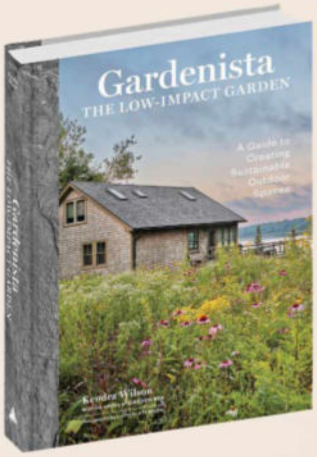
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and the fashion forward

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■ **Strawberry 'Cambridge Favourite'**
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Height x Spread 20cm x 30cm
Fruits Jun-early Jul

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An early-season variety with bright red, very firm fruits of superb quality and flavour. Eat fresh, use them to make your own jam or freeze them to enjoy out of season.
H x S 20cm x 30cm **F** Jun-Jul

■ **Strawberry 'Pegasus'**
A mid- to late-season variety and RHS award winner, it produces medium-large, soft, sweet and juicy fruit. A good choice for organic growing as it's resistant to verticillium wilt, crown rot and mildew.
H x S 15cm x 30cm **F** Jun-Jul

From planting to harvest 4-8 months
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Pale-green fruits ripen through pink to a deep burgundy colour, with a slightly tart flavour. They can be cooked or eaten fresh from the plant.
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Sara gathers fallen leaves in her garden and allotment then stores them, still moist, in hessian bags to make leafmould

Growing THE GOOD LIFE

Although the growing season is winding down, **Sara Ward** finds plenty to do, harvesting her produce and keeping the plot in good shape

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM

As the temperatures drop, everything seems to slow down, and while I'm happy for weeds to lose their enthusiasm, I'm pleased that brassicas and root vegetables welcome the chilled-out pace. Shorter days can mean less time outside in our growing spaces, but winter vegetables are patient and are often content to stay put, waiting until we want them for supper.

It's well worth spending half an hour on a dry day clearing fallen leaves. This not only keeps things tidy, reduces nesting spaces for slugs and snails, and lowers the risk of slipping, it also gathers up a valuable resource that will support soil health over the coming year. While there are several ways to make leaf mould, I collect leaves in hessian sacks – this stops them from blowing around in the wind – and pile them in a corner out of the way. The sacks slowly decompose along with the leaves, giving a humus that can be used as a mulch and soil improver.

> “Clearing leaves not only **keeps things tidy** it also gathers up a valuable resource that will **support soil health**”

I love rhubarb. I love it in crumbles and pies, in chutneys and cordials, in fruit liqueurs and as a simple compote on my breakfast yoghurt, however, I've learned over the years that rhubarb is quite particular as to where it wants to grow. Anything that restricts its water or sunshine will hinder its opportunity to thrive. And I've learnt this the hard way.

My first rhubarb patch was in the garden next to the compost bins, which I thought would provide extra nutrients to the roots. This seemed to work well for a year or so until the adjacent grapevine overshadowed it, blocking out the sun. My next attempt was down at the allotment, where I thought a lovely row in front of the fig tree would mark out the natural boundary between veg beds at the front of the plot and the fruit section at the back. Wrong again! The thirsty roots of the fig tree sucked all the moisture out of the nearby soil, causing my young rhubarb's early stems to shrivel. So, with all this experience, I've now planted up new rhubarb patches, both at home and at the allotment, in locations that should allow the sun and rain to nourish them, with space to let each plant spread far and wide.

November is a great time for planting new rhubarb crowns. I prepare the ground by clearing it of weeds and large stones, and dig a large hole for each crown that I then line with homemade compost. I place the new crown in the hole and pack it in with more compost, ensuring that I don't cover the buds from which next year's growth will emerge. I press it down firmly to ensure the roots have good contact with the soil, then refrain from harvesting in the first year to allow each plant time to establish itself.

> “I've learned over the years that rhubarb is quite particular as to where it wants to grow”

ABOVE Dig a hole that can comfortably house your rhubarb's entire root system
BELOW Position the plant so the tip of the crown is just above soil level

*SARA WORKED THIS OUT USING THE GOOD TO GROW HARVESTOMETER, AT: GOODTOGROWUK.ORG/HARVESTOMETER

PHOTO: XXXXXXXXX

Vine pruning

Now is the time for a thorough prune of the grapevine. With the leaves having dropped it becomes easier to see the stems. I cut back most of this year's new growth to keep the woody framework quite small and stable.

Each summer, grapes grow from new green shoots, and old stems, if not cut back tight, can just lead to an overlarge structure. So, using clean, sharp secateurs, I make a slightly angled cut just above a node. This will encourage rainwater to run off the cut to prevent rot and new growth next year can start from the nodes left behind. If I want to reshape the vine and remove larger stems of older wood, I wait until January to be sure the plant is fully dormant.

Late-season figs

A real treat at this time of year is our late crop of figs: the yellow figs on the allotment are an autumn variety and our tree at home has two main harvest periods, July and November. Figs are wonderful eaten fresh, superb in a warm salad with roasted walnuts and grilled goat's cheese, and if there's enough, I preserve them in a jam along with the zest and juice of a couple of oranges.

Figs need to ripen on the tree and must be eaten within a few days, which is why it's so expensive to buy imported figs that arrive in their plastic tubs with bubblewrap bedding. Growing our own figs not only saves money but also helps the environment, as every kilogramme of figs that we eat from our own tree saves 430g of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere from transportation.*

ABOVE Late November is a good time to prune vines, taking stems back to 2-3 buds **LEFT** Harvest figs when their necks are soft and the fruits teardrop-shaped

NOVEMBER Jobs

✔ **Plant currant bushes** I have recently discovered jostaberries, a cross between blackcurrants and gooseberries that produces large, juicy fruits with a rich, sweet flavour. As they can grow quite big, choose a large space where they won't overshadow other plants.

✔ **Move small fruit trees** I like doing this now when the tree is dormant and the ground isn't too hard to dig a hole big enough for the rootball. I'm moving my Humbug Pear tree, which produces green and yellow-striped fruit, from the home garden, where it was struggling, to join the allotment pear trees, which seem to be doing well.

✔ **Monitor cauliflowers** Keep an eye on cauliflowers so you don't miss their perfect moment for harvesting, before the florets start to open. I love the Romanesco variety with its bright-green spiral florets – they look amazing and taste great too!

✔ **Harvest winter squash** Squash varieties such as Turk's Turban won't grow any bigger now, so collect and store them carefully. Their hard skins form a natural protection, allowing us to eat them several months after harvesting. I like them peeled, diced and roasted, with seasoned olive oil and a pinch of chilli flakes.

✔ **Sow green manure** Take time to protect empty beds by sowing green manure seeds. I use a mix of clover, rye grass and white mustard. This helps fix nitrogen and improves the soil structure. After sowing, I cover the area with netting to stop wildlife disturbing the seeds as they germinate and take root. Next spring the young plants can be turned into the soil, adding valuable organic matter.

✔ **Check young sapling trees** These can grow from seeds dispersed by wildlife. Birds drop elderberries that can grow into huge trees, and squirrels seem to pick old fruit stones from my compost bin and bury them around the garden. If you don't want them to establish in their current locations, dig them up and transfer those you want to keep to pots or other locations so that they can have the best start in spring.

Romanesco is an attractive vegetable with a mild, nutty flavour that is enhanced when roasted

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NEXT MONTH Sara gets into the Christmas spirit on her plot gathering veg for a delicious festive lunch

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Root of the matter!

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How are we future-proofing our historic parks and gardens – and what can we learn in terms of creating sustainable new spaces going forward?

Barbara Segall is a gardens writer and author of *The Secret Gardens of the South East*, (Frances Lincoln, 2022). See *thegardenpost.substack.com* and *@barbarasegall*

We are fortunate in the UK that there are so many historic parks and gardens to enjoy, some for free, and some where an annual membership or one-off fee gives access. During the pandemic, many became places for regular exercise and offered us time and space to be outdoors.

Whenever I can, I love to visit the National Trust-managed garden at Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire, especially in winter when its sheets of snowdrops lift my winter blues, and in autumn the NT's Sheffield Park, with its lakes and colourful foliage reflections, help to ease the seasonal switch. I'm also keen to see the new Garden for the Future there, designed by Joe Perkins, encapsulating much of what our historic parks and gardens may embrace over the coming years.

But will they always be there for us to browse and wander? What might change the places we have come to treasure? Do we keep them in aspic, complete with outmoded yet colourful bedding schemes, closely mown lawns and single-species plantings, such as rose gardens, or do we rethink and come up with ways to future-proof them?

The threats are many – climate change, pests and diseases, soil and water management are among the issues that face us gardeners in our own individual spaces. Think big and you can see how, on a larger scale, they will greatly affect our historic parks and gardens, unless the organisations that look after them devise strategies for the future.

According to Matthew Pottage, new Head of Horticulture and Landscape Strategy at The Royal Parks, it's less about reducing bedding schemes and rose gardens and more about "looking closely at all our existing plantings, checking soil management and encouraging a stronger mycorrhizal community, and mulching to hold water and suppress weeds."

It will be interesting to see how the new two-acre garden in Regent's Park, to commemorate the life of Queen Elizabeth II, turns out. Located on the site of the former nursery that supplied the parks with bedding plants, it's set to be biodiverse and climate resilient, while also including many traditional plants that were significant to the late Queen.

A range of growing media are also on trial at The Royal Parks and other gardens, including crushed concrete and sand. Having seen how resilient the plants in the Walled Garden at Knepp Estate, West Sussex, are in such growing media, recycling or using this material at scale is worth investigating to help prevent erosion in dry and wet seasons.

"In carbon-reduction terms though, just not using peat-based composts offers the highest returns for gardeners and guardians of historic parks and gardens," says Malcolm Anderson, Head of Sustainability at the RHS. He also highlighted some mind-blowing statistics from The Wildlife Trusts: if in 2020 the 2.29 million cubic metres of peat dug up to be sold the UK had been left undisturbed, it would have stored 238,000 tonnes of carbon for millennia to come. While many individual gardeners and organisations are reducing their peat usage, still more pressure and education is needed to hasten the reduction.

The RHS is also focusing on sustainable rainwater harvesting, with a shift away from mains water and direct abstractions from rivers, lakes and boreholes, and an added emphasis on well-functioning, well-aerated soils. Something that the Eden Project pioneered some 25 years ago under the watch of its now CEO Andy Jasper, alongside immersive plantings, and the fact that Eden's biomes are heated by geothermal energy. Meanwhile, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, is planning to replace the failing and energy-inefficient glass of its iconic Palm House and Waterlily House, if it can raise the required £60 million. Without such costly and drastic action, these historic listed glasshouses and their important plant collections could be lost.

Certainly change is on the way in our public spaces, and for it to be successful, engagement with and education of us – the park users and visitors – will be key. Fullers Mill Garden, near Bury St Edmunds, was once a private garden and is now owned by the horticultural charity Perennial to preserve it for the future. When I visit, I can still hear the former owner's voice, and with its tranquil setting, river and stream, it's a horticultural treasure that I can admire without having to maintain.

If we can see ourselves in the historic parks and gardens going forward, their survival is much more likely. And if, for example, we can applaud more informal, biodiverse planting – rather than seeing it as untidiness or neglect – then we can encourage essential pollinators and wildlife into our shared spaces too.

> “The threats are many – climate change, pests and diseases, soil and water management – and will greatly affect our parks and gardens”

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NEXT MONTH...
Pollyanna Wilkinson discusses why winter is the best time to design your garden, including assessing and adding more structure during peak planting time

PHOTO: BARBARA SEGALL

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GWHY

WHAT TO DO NOW

50 things to do this month from the *Gardeners' World* team

This month!

90 Around the garden
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109 Back to basics
110 Fruit & veg

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

Cut back perennials

Clear away flower stems on perennials that no longer look good in your borders or that have flopped over so are unable to provide structure to the garden in winter. Cut them off at the base so you can easily remove a lot of plant material quickly.

Chop up or shred the stems and put them on the compost heap. Cut some of them in half and stack them up in an informal corner for insects to overwinter. Removing large perennials that offer little winter interest in terms of appearance will enhance the hedges and evergreens around them.

Getting rid of dead stems will let in light and air to plants, making them less prone to diseases

Pinching out encourages a bushier plant and more flowers

Pinch sweet peas

Remove the tips of young sweet pea plants when they reach a height of 10cm to encourage bushy growth. Use your thumb and forefinger to pinch out the tips just above a pair of leaves.

This should stop the young plants from becoming too leggy and flopping over. It will also encourage the development of sideshoots further down on the plant, resulting in a sturdier plant that can produce more flowers next year. Make sure the seedlings are receiving plenty of light to avoid them getting leggy.

Protect potted olive trees

Help prevent olives in containers from winter damage by covering the crown of the tree with breathable horticultural fleece. Carefully wrap it around the top of the tree and use pegs to close any gaps in the fleece.

Raise the pot onto feet to allow water to drain and wrap the pot with bubblewrap to help protect the roots from frost. If practical, move the pot to a sheltered corner out of strong winds.

Although hardy, olive plants will benefit from winter protection

TOP TIP

Check trees for support. Position a stake so the tree will be blown away from it to avoid damaging the bark and secure using a soft tie with the buckle against the stake, not the tree. Keep the stake low to allow the branches to move while the stem and roots are held still.

Patio roses are ideal for adding splashes of colour to dull spots

Plant a patio rose in a pot

Plant a patio rose in a deep (at least 25cm) container and use it to liven up dull corners in smaller plots and patios. Potted roses are available in garden centres in autumn, and patio roses – which have small leaves and a compact habit – are easy to look after in containers.

Fill the pot with John Innes No.3 compost and add the rose, making sure the union where the stems join the roots is just below the compost level. Firm in the compost, water and place in a sunny spot.

STEP BY STEP Plant evergreen shrubs

Check and prepare soil for planting evergreen shrubs. Now is a good time to plant if the soil is workable. Make sure your shrub is hardy and that it suits your soil and conditions.

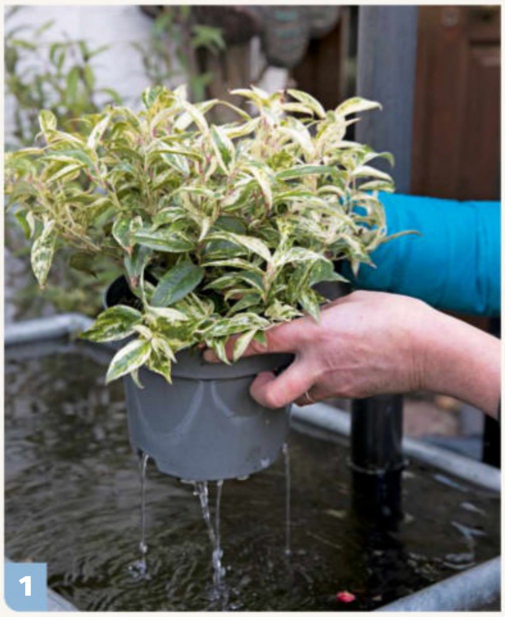
Variegated shrubs such as this *Leucothoe* 'Makijaz' tend to need sun or partial shade to keep their leaf colouring. Check newly planted shrubs regularly this month, making sure that they haven't become unseated by strong winds and that the soil hasn't dried out.

1 CHOOSE a healthy plant with an ultimate size that suits the gap you have. Before planting, dunk the plant in a water butt or bucket of water to soak the rootball, letting all the water drain out.

2 TURN the plant upside down and gently squeeze the pot, then give it a little shake. This should release the plant. If roots are growing through the bottom, you may have to cut the pot with scissors to release the plant.

3 DIG a hole twice the width of the rootball and the same depth. Use a fork to break up the sides and base of the hole. Tease out any spiralling roots, then place the plant in the hole and fill around with soil, firming it down well.

4 WATER in the plant, then spread a 5cm layer of compost mulch around it to conserve moisture and suppress weeds. Use a peat-free ericaceous compost for acid-lovers such as this leucothoe.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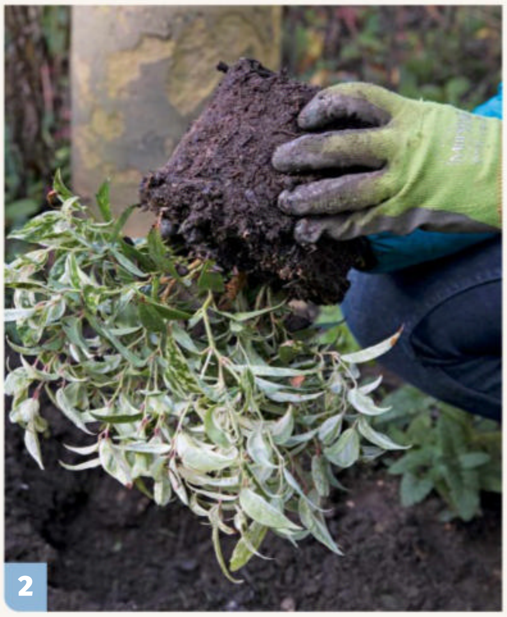
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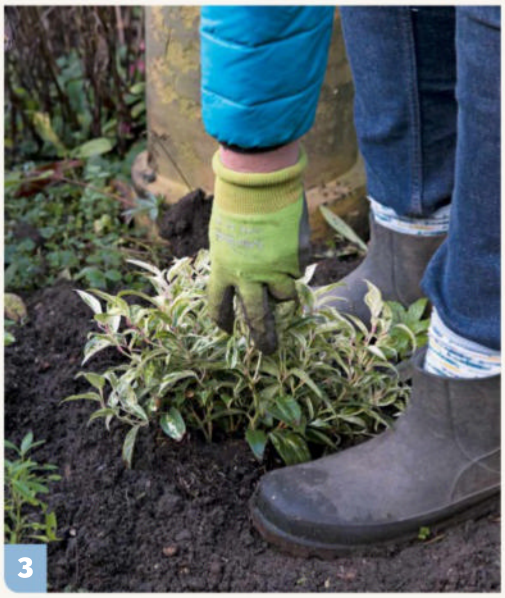
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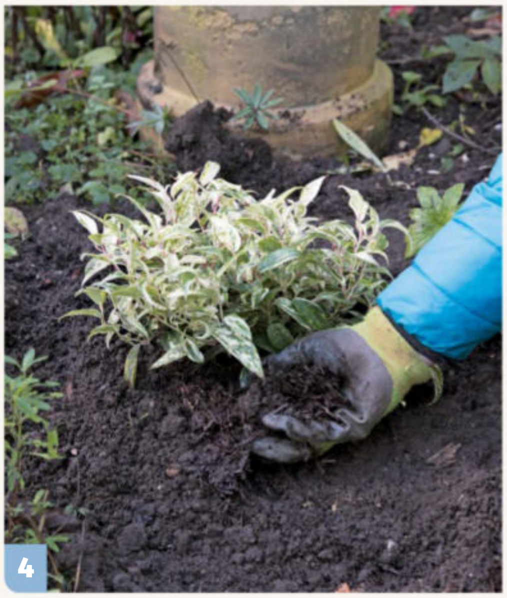
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Mowing leaves for leafmould will boost their breakdown process

Mow fallen leaves

On dry days, run a lawnmower over fallen leaves to collect them for making leafmould. Put the blades on a high setting so the grass isn't being cut short to prevent the lawn from becoming bare and muddy.

This will keep the lawn looking lush and healthy, and will speed up the rotting of the leaves. Mowing will also speed up the breakdown of leaves high in lignin and low in nitrogen and calcium, such as sycamore and horse chestnut. Pile up the mown leaves in a bay made of chicken wire or fill bin bags with them and spike holes in the bags to let air escape.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Sow seeds of hardy trees and shrubs**
- ☐ **Move compost bags indoors to stop them from freezing**
- ☐ **Put chicken wire over planted bulbs to deter mice and squirrels**
- ☐ **Clean and sharpen shears before putting them away for winter**
- ☐ **Store bamboo canes in a garage or shed for next year**

WORDS: ROSIE YEOMANS. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM; TIM SANDALL.

Waiting until after the first frost to plant tulip bulbs will reduce the risk of diseases such as tulip fire

Plant tulips in containers

Create displays of tulips for the patio. First, add a layer of gravel to the bottom of a large container to provide drainage. Add peat-free multi-purpose potting compost, filling the pot to 20cm below the rim. Firm down the compost and place the bulbs about 5-7cm apart, with their tips pointing up.

Cover with more compost, filling the pot to within 5cm of the rim. Firm it down between the bulbs as you go. Water thoroughly to soak the compost. Stand the container in a sheltered position over autumn and winter, ensuring the compost stays moist, but does not freeze during cold spells.

Fill your spare patio pots

Plant fresh seasonal plants in containers that you have emptied of spent annuals, bedding and edible crops. Clean the pots and fill with peat-free multi-purpose compost, then add autumn and winter bedding plants such as cineraria, ornamental brassicas and violas.

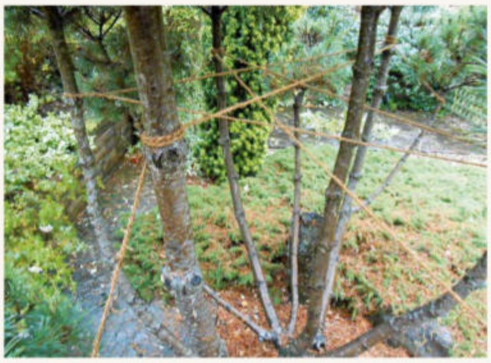
Cram the plants close together so the pot looks instantly full, and water in well once, then only water again if the compost is dry all the way down. Place newly planted pots near a path edge, entrance or in a place where they can be seen from indoors.

Potted plants will provide colour when little else is growing

Beechgrove

BEECHGROVE ON TV

The series is off-air until spring, but the garden is tended over winter. Watch any missed episodes on BBC iPlayer.



Extra support during winter will help cypress trees cope with harsh weather and heavy snowfall

VIEW FROM BEECHGROVE

Give conifers winter support

There is always the chance of severe winter weather arriving early at Beechgrove, and upright and cloud-pruned conifers need protection from damage in the event of heavy snowfall. Our technique involves using sturdy hop string. On cloud-pruned trees, attach the string to a bare stem just below a conifer cloud and wind it around the stem opposite, repeating this to create a cross-brace structure that supports the limbs. Spiral the hop string all the way up to the height of upright conifers to keep the branches together and protected until spring.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Protect apple tree trunks with chicken wire to prevent damage from rabbits and ring barking
- ☐ Add organic matter to polytunnel beds
- ☐ Check cuttings of half-hardy perennials and water if they have nearly dried out
- ☐ Protect potted Japanese maples by moving them into a cold greenhouse
- ☐ Take root cuttings of echinops and verbascum

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; TIM SANDALL

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Hippeastrum 'Wild Amazone'

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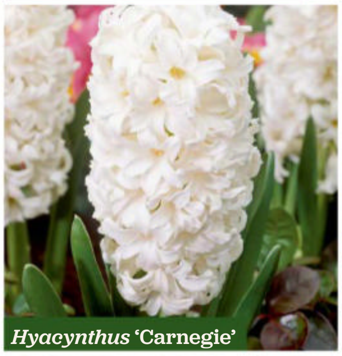
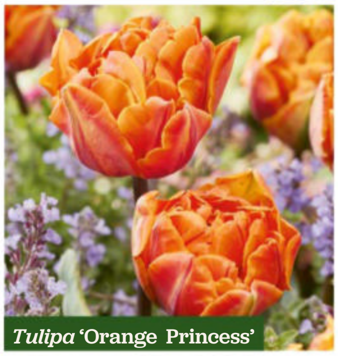
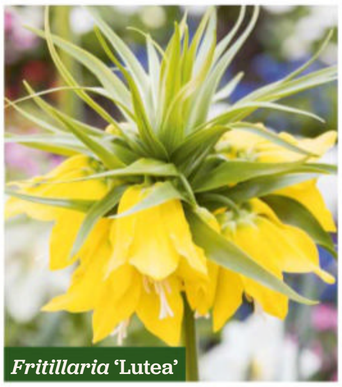

Hyacynthus 'Carnegie'


Tulipa 'Orange Princess'


Fritillaria 'Lutea'

Tulipa 'Queen of Night'

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Whether you've found a few gaps to fill or you're just getting started, there's an incredible range of bulbs available and still plenty of time to plant them. When the garden is sorted, you could complete your gardening year with something special to grow indoors this winter and start the new year with a bang. With this exclusive offer you will save on postage and pick up some fantastic bargains.

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■ ***Hippeastrum* 'Wild Amazone'** Gorgeous lime-green and cantaloupe petals. **H x S** 60cm x 25cm **F** Dec-Feb 1 bulb **£14.90**

■ ***Hippeastrum* Cherry Nymph** Sturdy, long-lasting blooms in a rich, velvety red. **H x S** 60cm x 25cm **F** Dec-Feb 1 bulb **£14.90**

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■ ***Fritillaria imperialis* 'Lutea'** Eye-catching bright-yellow, bell-shaped flowers. **H x S** 85cm x 20cm **F** Apr-May 1 bulb **£5.50**

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The bright colours of cyclamen will lift dull, shady areas in winter when little else is flowering

Add cyclamen for instant colour

Plant cyclamen in leaf under hedges or at border edges for instant texture and colour. Hardy ivy-leaved cyclamen (*Cyclamen hederifolium*) is best in cold gardens and although it will finish flowering soon, its intricate marbled foliage will provide interest throughout winter.

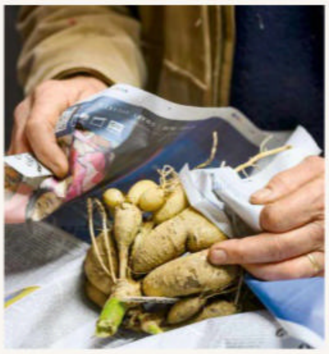
In milder gardens, you may be able to get the showier varieties of *C. persicum* through winter. These forms offer a wider range of flower colours. Plant in free-draining soil adding lots of rotted compost or leaf mould to the hole before planting. Water in well once and only water again if very dry.

Be gentle when tying in fragile stems and keep the knot loose

Tie in wayward rambling roses

Check rambling roses for stray stems and secure them into the main framework of the plant using rubber ties or soft string. Don't pull the string too hard or you can damage the stems.

If it looks too congested as you start tying them in, remove one or two of the oldest stems at the base to prevent the plant from becoming messy, which can accelerate the onset of fungal disease. Cut off any sideshoots growing away from the plant's support that refuse to bend into the main framework.



Make sure dahlia tubers are dry when storing them over winter

Store dahlias

Lift and store dahlia tubers if you live in a cold spot or garden on clay soil to prevent them rotting over winter. Lift the tubers with a fork, taking care not to damage them with the fork spikes. Shake off as much soil as you can.

Then, using secateurs, cut down the dahlia stems and compost the leaves. Once your tubers are dry, wrap them in dry newspaper, or pack them in a box and cover with dry compost. Store the tubers in a frost-free place, such as under greenhouse staging, or in a dry shed or garage.

Grow alliums

Plant allium bulbs at least four times the depth of the bulb. Don't have more than one bulb in the same planting hole, but for a more naturalistic display, plant smaller-growing alliums 7-10cm apart, and taller varieties around 20cm apart.

If the soil is moist there's no need to water them in. In spring, when growth starts to appear, apply a balanced fertiliser to poor soils. Place a cane or large wooden label in the ground where you have planted them, so you don't disturb the ground by accident.

Plant allium bulbs in a sheltered, sunny spot in free-draining soil

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM.

STEP BY STEP Lift and pot up vigorous perennials

Dig up clumps of vigorous perennials (here, *Lysimachia ephemerum*) that are taking up more than their allotted space in the border. While new places to plant may not be available at this time of year, growing them on in pots allows you to replant them in spring once you have prepared new planting positions.

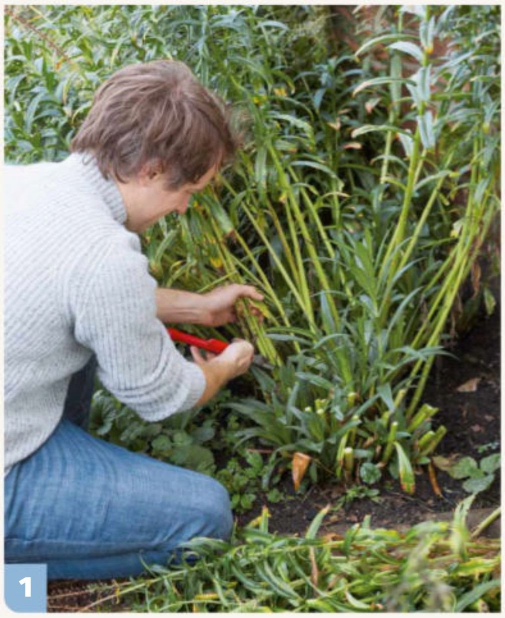
Potting them up after lifting also means you can give away any plants that you can't use to friends and family.

1 CUT back the old flower stems so that you can easily see the clump as a whole, and the extent of how much it has spread, in order to decide how much of the plant you want to remove.

2 USE a spade to loosen the soil all the way around the clump so that the plant can easily be removed from the ground without the roots having to be ripped out, which could damage the plant.

3 TRANSPLANT the new clump into a slightly wider pot, placing a 10cm layer of peat-free multi-purpose compost at the base. Add more compost, firm it down so there are no air pockets, then water.

4 ADD a label, with the plant name on it, at the edge of the pot so you don't forget what the plant is when it dies back in winter, and place it in a sheltered corner before planting out in the spring.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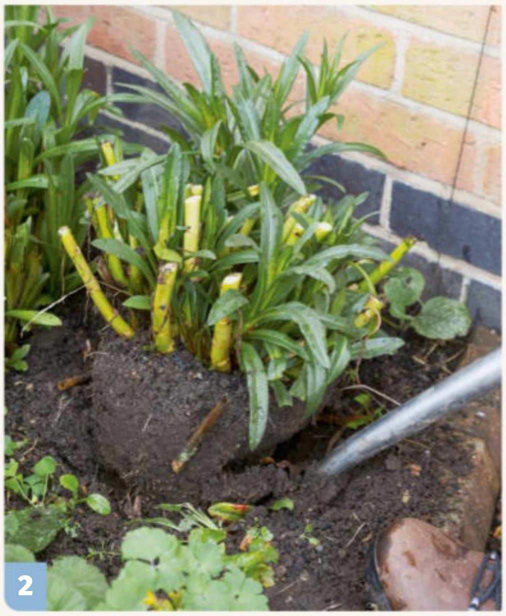
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30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Lift and pot up perennial plants that may not survive a very wet or cold winter, such as salvia 'Amistad', pelargoniums and fuchsias. Cut back the plants by a third and lift with the soil intact, then pot up with peat-free compost. Keep in a greenhouse, cold frame or sheltered spot outside.

Feverfew makes great indoor displays, especially when dried

Cut late-flowering plants

Make the most of very late perennial flowers such as dahlias, symphyotrichum (asters), Japanese anemones and *Tanacetum parthenium* (pictured) by cutting some to display in a room indoors, where they can be enjoyed close up and aren't surrounded by lots of tired foliage and spent annuals.

Use snips to cut them close to ground level so you avoid leaving muddy stumps on the plant that will be an eyesore in the border during winter. Add some cut-flower food to your vase before displaying the blooms indoors.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Keep planting daffodils in gaps and containers**
- ☐ **Take hardwood cuttings of shrubs as leaves fall**
- ☐ **Lift and store gladioli bulbs**
- ☐ **Mulch alpines and succulents with a 1cm layer of alpine grit**
- ☐ **Remove spent annuals and bedding plants**

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cashmere centre

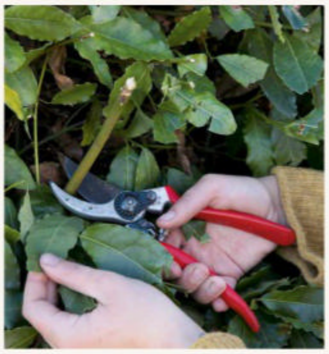
Removing lower leaves and stray stems from bamboo helps expose the interesting stems

Give bamboo stems a trim

Remove the lower leaves from bamboos to show off the stems for autumn and winter interest. Trim off stray stems around the base of the plant, using sharp snips or secateurs and cut them off flush with the main stem.

Also consider removing a few canes completely at the base if they are spoiling the look of the clump or spreading too far.

Save them to use as plant supports. Finish by removing weeds and old foliage from ground level and adding a compost or bark mulch to show off the stems as well as possible.



Cut any bare stems back to just above a leaf to keep bays tidy

Tidy bay plants

Check over bay plants that are harvested regularly and trim back any bare stems.

Use clean, sharp secateurs to cut bare stems back just above a leaf, lower than the main canopy of leaves, to leave a neat finish.

Established bays, whether standards or bushes, are useful evergreens for winter interest so removing snags and bare spindly, stems will help show them off as well as possible. Also trim off any shoots developing too low down on the stem of standard bays, to keep the classic lollipop shape.

Prune out sideshoots that can't be bent back to the supports

Prune out old fruited canes

Prune out all the old fruited canes from blackberries and other hybrid berries such as loganberries and tayberries. Check for any stems still carrying the remains of the fruit stalks, and cut them back to ground level. If training the plants against a wall or fence, trim back any sideshoots that can't be bent back to their supports, making a clean cut back to the main stem. Thorny protruding stems can become a nuisance if not kept to their allotted space.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE

Cut dead stems out of shrubs

If you've got an established shrubby lavatera such as 'Barnsley' that has long woody stems, prune the plant back by up to half to prevent it from being rocked about in windy conditions.

Use secateurs to make a cut just above a sideshoot, keeping all the stems the same height. If possible, shred the stems so you can add them to the compost heap. This pruning will reduce the risk of root disturbance and is especially important for lavateras in an exposed location.

Shrubby lavatera can be cut back by up to half to reduce the risk of windrock and root disturbance

Trim down herbs

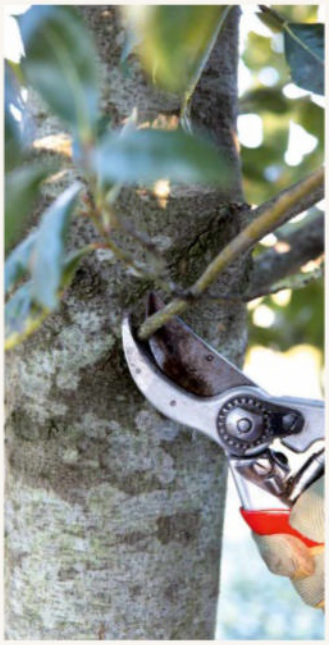
Use sharp topiary shears or secateurs to trim evergreen herbs such as thyme and winter savory into a neat, dome shape before winter arrives. It's a good idea to remove any remaining flowers in the process.

This will help to protect the plants from high winds or snow. Be careful not to prune back too hard, as this will create deep cuts that may not heal.

Pick all the trimmings from the plant when you're done and use some of your clippings in the kitchen. Freeze or dry the surplus if you've got lots of prunings.

Trim back evergreen herbs such as thyme to protect them in winter

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM



Carefully snip lower branches as close to the trunk as possible

Crown lift trees

Improve the appearance of established trees by removing lower branches (known as crown lifting). Use sharp secateurs, loppers or a pruning saw to cut the branches back as close as possible to the trunk of the tree without cutting into the trunk. Assess the tree before you start and aim to leave a balanced network of branches and a natural shape.

It's best to avoid doing this to young trees because early in the life of a tree these sideshoots are crucial for its health as their foliage produces sugars to help thicken up the main stem or trunk. Avoid pruning any prunus trees (cherries, apricots, plums and peaches) because it can increase the risk of canker and silver leaf.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Sharpen, oil and sterilise cutting blades to make pruning easier
- ☐ Chop back old leaves of hybrid hellebores
- ☐ Reduce very tall buddlejas by a third in height
- ☐ Remove a few old stems from redcurrant bushes

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David Hurrion

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Water a budding Christmas cactus if compost goes dry, checking that the plant isn't waterlogged

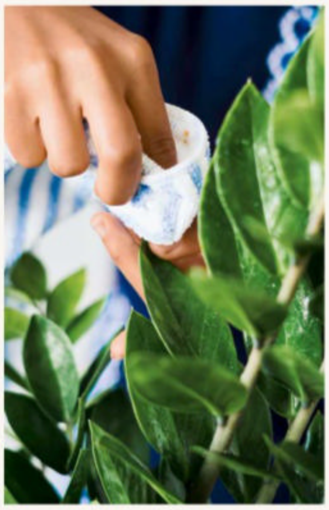
Care for Christmas cactus

Keep Christmas cactus plants (*schlumbergera*) at a steady temperature of 18-20ºC this month now that buds should have appeared and flowers are starting to open. This will encourage a good flowering display, whereas a sudden dip in temperature could cause buds to drop.

Plants in bud need watering each time the compost goes dry until flowers fade, but make sure excess water drains away so that the plant isn't sitting in water for long periods. Christmas cactus need exposure to a cool period (ideally 12-15ºC) through autumn to initiate flower buds.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Take leaf cuttings from foliage begonias
- ☐ Remove fallen leaves from the compost surface of pots
- ☐ Move plants away from cold windowsills as temperatures drop
- ☐ Clean windows to maximise light levels in the shorter days
- ☐ Put a thermometer up indoors to monitor growing conditions



Keep foliage free from dust with a light misting and a soft cloth

Keep leaves of ZZ plant clean

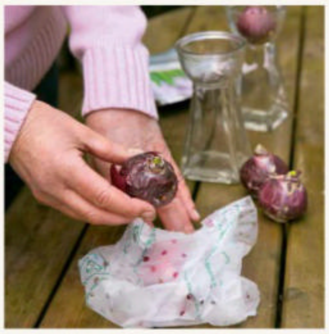
This popular glossy-leaved house plant is good for growing in dark corners but can easily be forgotten and accumulate a lot of dust. To clean the leaves, mist them with a spray gun filled with water kept at room temperature, then use a soft cloth to gently wipe the moisture from each leaf.

Repeat this every week or so if the plant is in a room with an open fire or log burner, to raise the humidity. Make sure the plant is kept out of direct light and at 13-26ºC to ensure the foliage stays healthy.

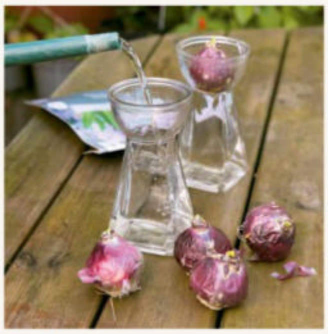
STEP BY STEP

Plant hyacinths

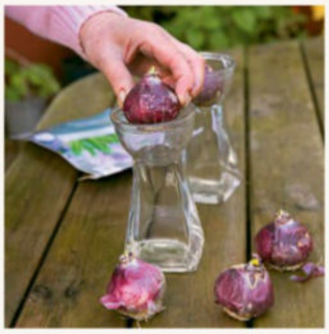
Forced hyacinths are an easy way to brighten up your home and you don't even need any compost to grow them, just some glass hyacinth vases or any glass vases with a narrower top than bottom that can easily hold a bulb. Make sure the bulbs are prepared bulbs for forcing.



1 CHECK bulbs are firm with no signs of rot before you start. Bulbs kept in warm retail environments can become soft and unviable surprisingly quickly.



2 FILL each vessel with water to just below where the bulb's base will sit. Putting some decorative stones or marbles in the bottom will keep the vase steady.



3 PLACE your bulbs in the vase, pointy end up and 5mm above the water surface. Bulbs can irritate skin so you could wear gloves when handling them.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

Divide pollinator-friendly perennials such as astrantia and replant around the garden for free plants

Divide perennials for free plants

Create more wildlife-friendly plants by digging up, dividing and replanting perennials now. You can do this with pollinator favourites such as hardy geraniums, primroses, astilbe, eryngium, salvia, verbena and astrantia.

Simply dig up the rootballs and divide them into separate pieces using two forks back to back (pictured) or an old knife. Discard any old woody bits of root and replant the new divisions around the garden, or give them to friends as a wildlife-friendly gift.

Water them thoroughly and continue watering regularly if conditions are dry.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ **Leave kitten biscuits and water out for hedgehogs, which need to fatten up before hibernation**
- ☐ **Clean out and repair bird boxes, before putting them back up for winter roosting**
- ☐ **Clear space where you need to for planting, but leave plants intact elsewhere to provide shelter for insects**
- ☐ **Keep bird baths topped for birds to clean their feathers, which keeps them warmer in winter**
- ☐ **Leave rosehips on roses until they have been eaten by birds or small mammals, or have turned black**

Plant bare-root hedge plants 45cm apart

Plant a mixed, native hedge

A hedge helps to buffer wind, creating sheltered areas for both plants and pollinators alike. It absorbs water and CO_2 and provides food and habitats for a huge range of species, from insects to birds and even hedgehogs.

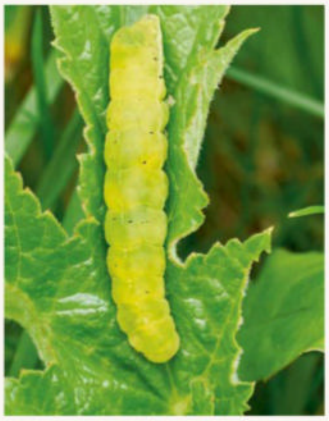
A mixed, native hedge, comprising hawthorn, hazel, dog rose, guelder rose, spindle and blackthorn is ideal, as it provides the greatest range of food and habitat. But a single species hedge can be nearly as good.

Buy cost-effective bare-root hedging and soak the roots before planting, then plant in a prepared trench at 45cm spacings.

Make caterpillar dens for moths

Of Britain's 2,500 moth species, more than half spend winter as a caterpillar. They hunker down beneath their food plant, in the thatch of grass or in leaf litter. Some species, such as the angle shades moth, may emerge from hibernation on mild days to feed.

Create overwintering dens where they can shelter safely. Pile up twigs, fallen leaves and other detritus in small heaps around the garden and in corners, such as behind plant pots, and leave them in place until spring.



The angle shades moth caterpillar may emerge on mild days to feed

30 MINUTES TO SPARE

If you have a wildflower meadow, now's your last chance to sow yellow rattle. This semi-parasite of grass restricts grass growth, enabling wildflowers to thrive.

Buy fresh seed and sow onto scarified grass, with plenty of exposed soil patches. Press the seed into the soil so it makes contact. Yellow rattle should germinate in spring, having been exposed to low temperatures and moist soil over winter.

WORDS: KATE BRADBURY. PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; GETTY/WIRESTOCK; JASON INGRAM

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Add a trowel of warmed compost to the planting hole to give plants a boost

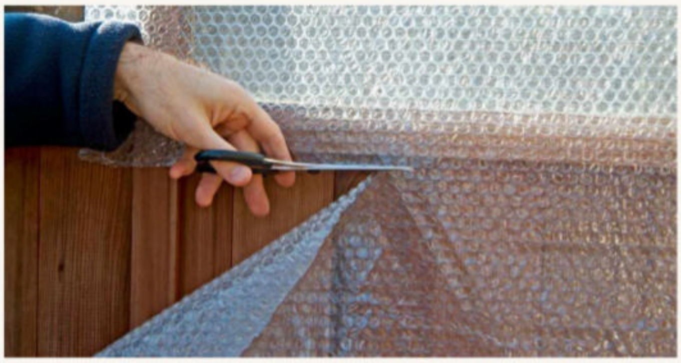
Plant winter salads in borders

Add winter salads, sown or bought in modules, to your greenhouse borders. Corn salad, mizuna, rocket and leaf chicory will grow slowly but steadily in a greenhouse to give tasty, nutritious leaves through the cold months, especially if the greenhouse is insulated.

Mix a trowelful of compost that's been warmed indoors into the bottom of each planting hole to give the new plants a boost, and water in well. Only water again when the soil dries out and keep an eye out for slugs and snails.

DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Pick and store the last chillies
- ☐ Pick and bin diseased or dying foliage
- ☐ Ventilate on very mild days, closing doors or vents in the afternoon
- ☐ Check plants for signs of scale insect (scales under leaves)
- ☐ Remove leaves from gutters and add them to the compost heap
- ☐ Sow cyclamen seeds in pots – keep them between 12-15°C for good germination



Cut wrap to size with scissors before tacking or clipping it in place

Attach warming insulation

Insulate the inside of your greenhouse with bubblewrap to help keep it free from frost. This can completely eliminate the need to heat the greenhouse with a heater in winter, depending on what you use the greenhouse for.

If you have a wooden framed greenhouse you can simply pin or tack the wrap in place, or buy packs of fixing clips for aluminium frames. Clean the glass first to ensure maximum light, and cut the bubblewrap to size with scissors.

Scrub pots and trays to keep fungal spores and pests at bay

Clean pots and trays

Now is a good time to collect up all your pots and trays and clean before storing in the greenhouse. This prevents pests and fungal spores from surviving over winter.

Use a scouring sponge or washing up brush to scrub pots and trays inside and out, using a little disinfectant. Rinse them out then, once you've finished it's the perfect opportunity to stack them all into size order so potting and sowing is a smoother process for next year's crops. Make sure you store terracotta pots in a frost-free place so they don't crack.

Check stored crops regularly

Regularly keep an eye on stored crops in the greenhouse because any that were slightly spoiled may start to go bad quickly, especially if temperatures are noticeably warm.

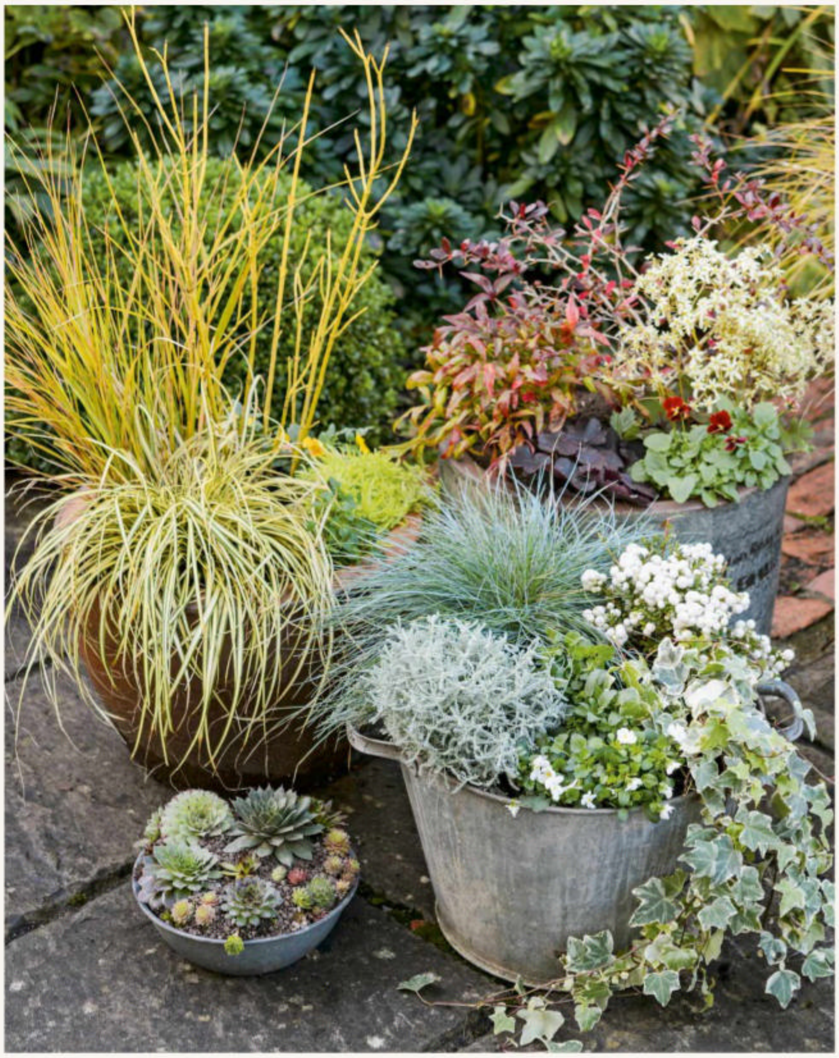
Use any crops starting to spoil straightaway to minimise the damage, and make sure they are not close to anything being watered and getting splashed.

Push the skins of squashes and if they are soft, use immediately, cutting off spoilt parts and cooking the rest.

If any stored crops show signs of spoiling then use immediately

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM; TIM SANDALL

Make a metal planter display

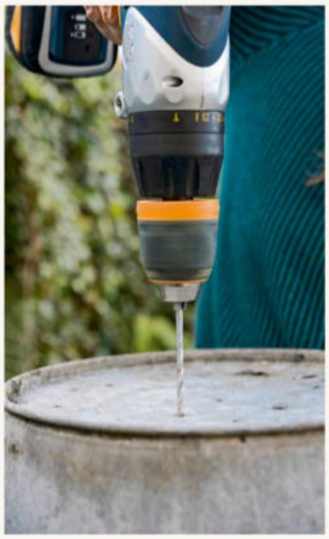

Recycled metal buckets and old tin baths are perfect for year-round pot displays

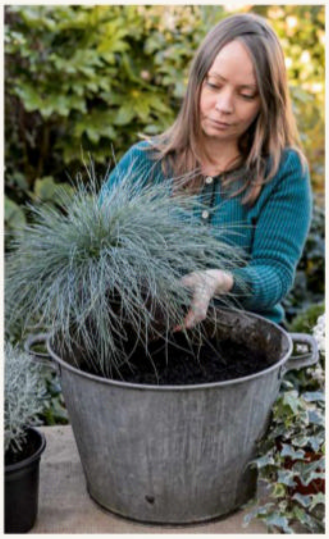
Metal planters are a stylish addition to the patio and won't be damaged by frost so are a good choice for a year-round container display. Recycled tin baths or buckets work well planted with silvery leaves or white variegation, to create a coordinated look on the patio.

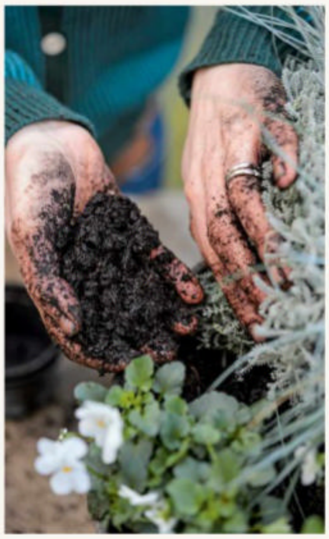
A cool white and silver colour scheme in a pot has a lot of impact at this time of year among the prevailing autumn shades of golds and reds. Metal planters are also well-suited to a shady spot on the patio in summer because they can get very hot. You could line the inside of the pot with bubblewrap if it has to go in full sun.

Whatever type of metal pot you choose, add drainage holes before planting and raise the pot off the ground to allow water to escape and reduce the onset of corrosion. At this time of year, plant up your pots so there are no gaps to give an instant effect because there will be little growth until spring.

STEP BY STEP Planting up a metal container


1 TURN the pot upside down and use a drill fitted with a metal drill bit and carefully drill at least three drainage holes (five in a very large container) evenly spaced in the bottom of the container.


2 HALF fill the pot with an equal parts mix of John Innes compost and peat-free multi-purpose compost then place the biggest plants first. Tussock-forming grasses such as *Festuca glauca* work well hanging over the edge.


3 CAREFULLY infill all the gaps between plants with more compost mix, firming it with your hands to ensure all the plants are well-anchored and that there are no gaps, which can cause puddles to form and could cause plants to rot.

4 WATER the plants in well, stopping when puddles form and only water again when compost is dry deep down (push your finger into the compost to check). Keep checking, regularly, especially in windy spells without rain.

PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM

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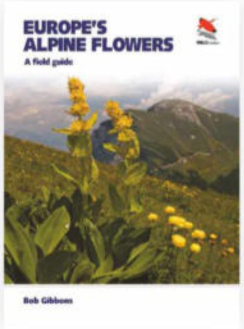

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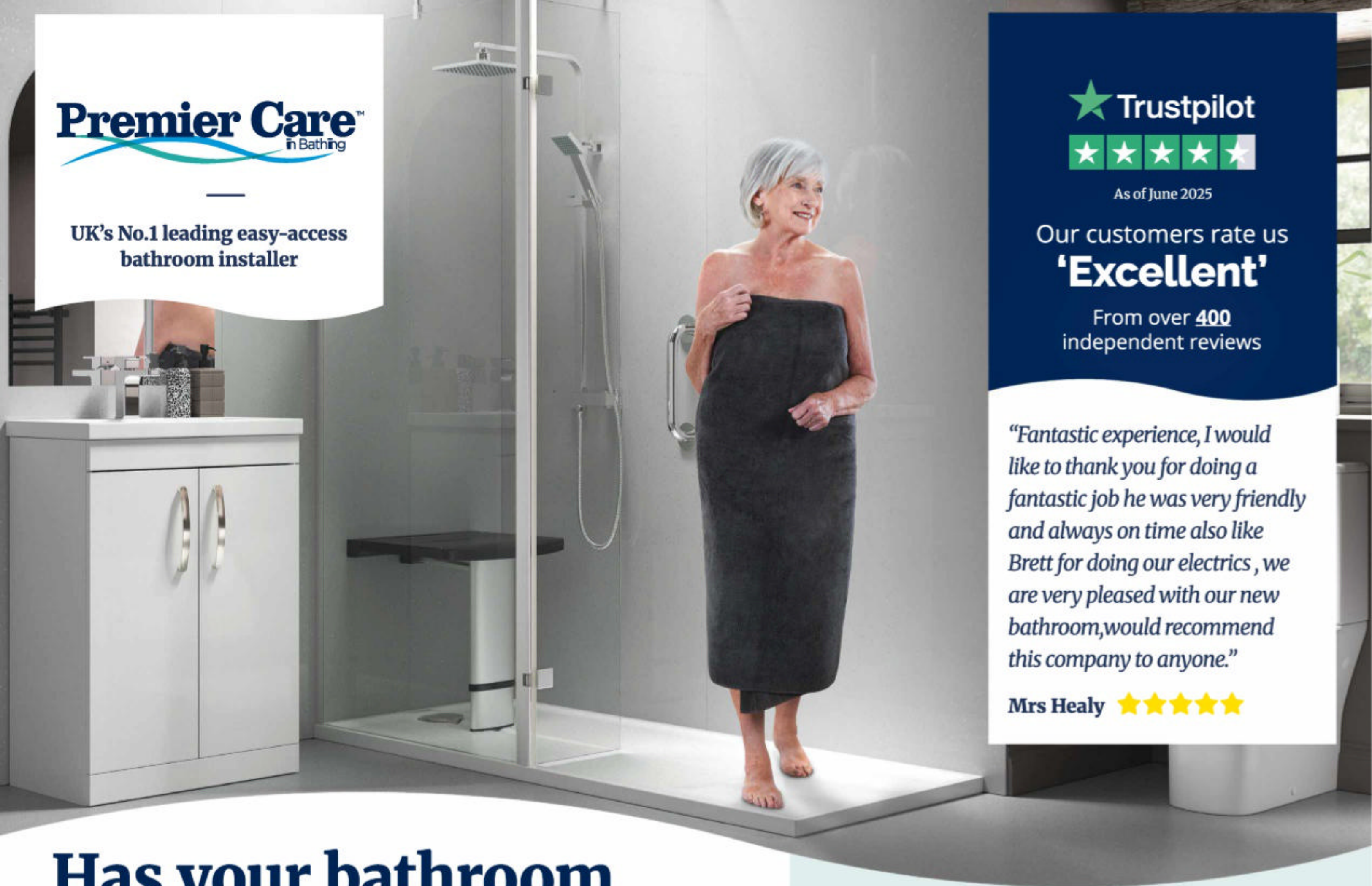

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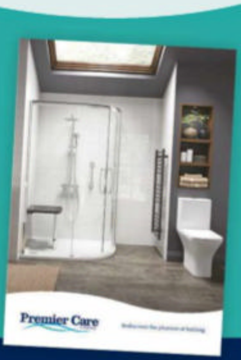

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Sow peas now for pea shoot pickings over autumn and winter, or for crops next summer

Sow peas in pots

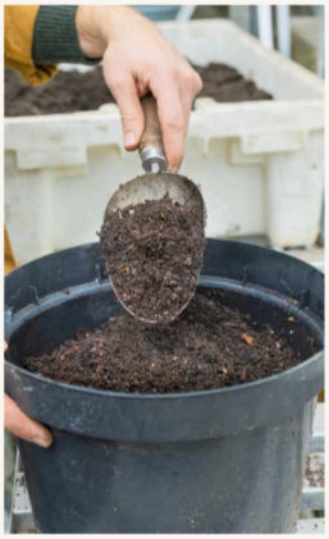
Pea can be sown now, either to overwinter and harvest as pods in early summer or to harvest as pea shoots throughout autumn and winter.

Pea shoots are the perfect crop for a tiny space and will produce a harvest of tasty young shoots in a just a few weeks if grown indoors on a sunny windowsill. To grow them for a mature crop of peas next year, choose a hardy autumn-sowing variety such as ‘Meteor’ and sow them in a large pot in a greenhouse or cold frame.

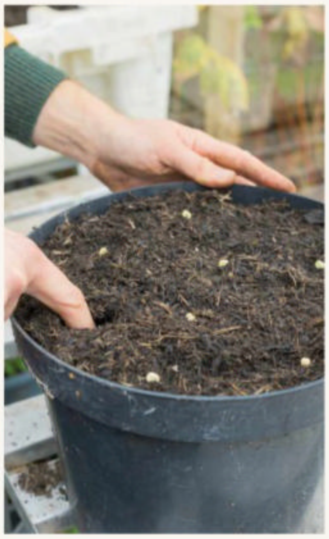
Peas for the windowsill can be sown close together in pots 20cm wide and deep because you will harvest them as a cut-and-come-again crop. Those grown to maturity for a summer harvest will need spacing further apart and a pot at least 30cm deep.

In very free-draining soils in mild areas you could also try direct sowing outdoors and covering the young plants with cloches. Only water the crop through winter when the compost is dry.

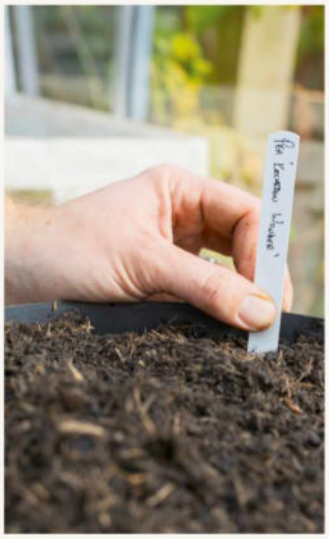
STEP BY STEP Sow hardy peas for an early summer harvest



1 FILL a sturdy pot at least 30cm deep with equal parts peat-free multi-purpose compost and soil-based John Innes compost just below the rim of the pot and firm it down gently with your hands to check the level.



2 SPACE seeds at intervals of 10cm in all directions, to give each plant space to grow to maturity. Peas sown for cut-and-come-again shoots can be sown much thicker, sprinkling them so they are all close, but not touching.



3 COVER the seed with a layer of compost 5cm deep. Place a label carefully in the edge of the pot so that it doesn’t dislodge any seeds. Add the date to observe how long the crop takes until harvest, for future reference.

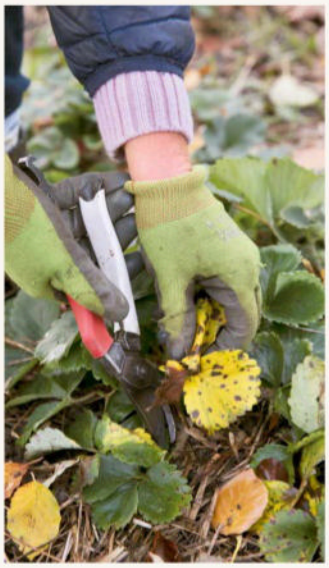
4 WATER your crop using a rose attachment, soaking the compost gently. A strong jet of water may disturb the seeds. Ideally use water that has been warmed in a greenhouse or indoors. Place your pot in its final position.

PHOTOS: NEIL HEPWORTH

Tidy strawberries

Remove dead and dying strawberry foliage, old straw and any netting still covering your plants to prepare the crop for next year. Put all the old straw on the compost heap and the dead leaves in the garden waste bin.

Cut the foliage back to 5cm above ground level. Removing all this old material will help avoid a build up of pests and diseases, and expose slugs and snails to birds who will be glad of the banquet! Finally, dig out any perennial weeds that had previously gone unnoticed.



Cut out old foliage to allow in air and help keep plants healthy

30 MINUTES TO SPARE

Rhubarb crowns can be planted from now until mid-spring. This perennial crop is very hardy and requires a period of cold before it will start growing in spring. Choose a planting position that is not shaded but with moist free-draining soil. Avoid pulling stems in the first year after planting.

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM.

Picking kale only when you need it will give you the best flavour and keep the plant going for longer

Start your kale harvest now

Harvest leaves from mature kale plants as and when you need them, for maximum freshness and taste. Kale can be blanched and frozen but because the plants are hardy, and attractive on the veg patch, it is easier to pick the leaves fresh as required. Start with the outer leaves and take just a few from each of your plants. Your kale plants will last all winter if you harvest like this.

The most tender leaves are in the centre but if you take the whole crown, there will be nothing left to crop except maybe a few spring shoots that will eventually emerge from the stump.

Remove unripened figs

Pick off unripened figs on your fig trees, leaving the tiny, pea-sized embryo fruitlets. Figs can produce several stages of crop at the same time but only one will ripen in the UK, in September or October. Larger unripened figs won't ripen over winter and will drop off in late spring, which can make the next batch of fruits develop too late to ripen properly before the end of the season. The embryo fruitlets will overwinter and ripen in summer.

Unripened figs left on plants can cause problems for the next crop

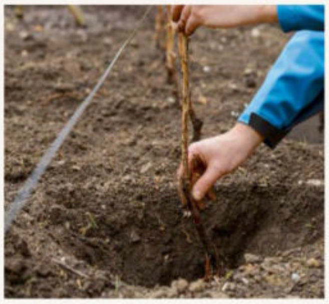
DON'T FORGET

- ☐ Move citrus trees into a cool conservatory or frost-free greenhouse for winter
- ☐ Prune grapevines after leaf fall
- ☐ Harvest parsnips once they've been exposed to frost
- ☐ Spread compost or manure over empty areas on the veg patch

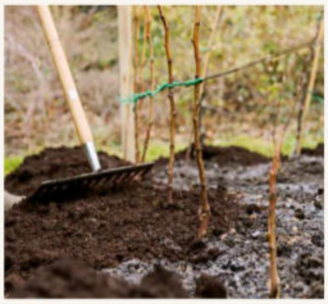
STEP BY STEP

Plant summer raspberry canes

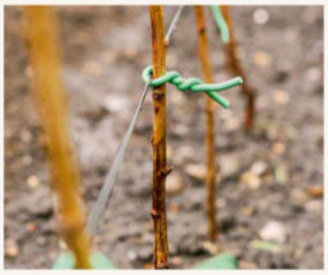
Prepare a new row of bare-root raspberries by weeding the area and putting in supports. Mid-season varieties fruit in June or July on the previous year's canes so are held upright against horizontal wires on posts. Late-season types fruit on the current canes from late summer so are left to grow as a clump but will need space.



1 PLANT new canes 45cm apart, digging out a planting hole big enough to fit the rootball without it being squashed. Mix a spadeful of rotted garden compost into the base of each hole.



2 COVER the roots with 5cm of soil and firm it down gently with your foot, then give each cane a good soak before covering the soil surface with a 5cm mulch layer of rotted compost.



3 PRUNE the canes to 30cm from ground level then tie the canes to horizontal supports attached to sturdy posts, using soft ties. New fruiting canes will grow up from the roots next spring.

Overwintering onion sets planted now will produce larger, more flavoursome crops ready to harvest early next summer

Start off your first onion sets in trays

Plant some onion sets in module trays if your soil is slightly on the heavy side and gets boggy in autumn and winter. Fill trays with peat-free multi-purpose compost, making sure that the trays can comfortably fit the sets without them having to be squashed into the module.

Push one set into each module, so it is buried at least half deep. Water them in well then keep them in a sheltered spot outside or in a cold frame before planting out towards the end of winter.

Cut parsley stems down to the soil to avoid the plant rotting

Harvest parsley

Cut back fresh parsley stems to the base when harvesting them, so that no leafless stems are left to rot. Discard any that are yellowing and use fresh shoots in the kitchen straightaway. Both curly and flat-leaf parsley are hardy and if grown in large amounts, will keep you supplied all winter.

Like other soft evergreen winter crops you will see new shoots emerge in warmer spells. If you have some spare, cover the crop with fleece to give better-quality shoots in winter, but you'll still get a crop without it.

Next month!

- ☐ **Look after winter pots**
- ☐ **Take root cuttings of favourite perennials**
- ☐ **Protect brassica plants from pigeons**
- ☐ **Cover soil ready for next year's crops**

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; JASON INGRAM

The coastline near Punta Gorda is dotted with tiny islands called cayes

Garden globetrotting: *Belize*

With a diverse landscape ranging from jungles to beach-clad coastlines, the Central American country of Belize is a tropical destination full of surprises, as **Adam Duxbury** discovers

Adam Duxbury, Head of Content

To me, a memorable trip is when you visit a part of the world that still has the power to surprise you. And on a recent trip to Belize, by the end of the first day I had lost count of how many times I quite literally stopped in my tracks, gasping at yet another surprising discovery. "That's what their wild coriander tastes like?"; "A black howler monkey is making that noise?"; "You can see Guatemala from the top of this pyramid?" I think you get the idea…

Driving inland from the flat coastal plains of the country's former capital Belize City, the landscape changes dramatically, becoming steep and densely covered with the trees for which the country is famous, including mahogany, sapodilla (whose sap, or chicle, made the original chewing gum), Santa Maria and Spanish cedar. My first night was high in the Chiquibul Rainforest at Sweet Songs Jungle Lodge, located next to Belize Botanic Gardens. Spending time exploring this this wonderful garden's 45 acres was a highlight. The garden is home to over 100 of the 300-plus orchid species native to Belize, including the black orchid (*Prosthechea cochleata*), the country's national flower. The garden does great work in conservation and education, and it's a paradise for anyone interested in tropical plants, particularly those with medicinal qualities.

For most of the stops on my trip I was accompanied by a guide, and one thing they all had in common was a natural appreciation and understanding of the medicinal power of their country's endemic plants. Most could easily identify the plants around them and name their uses. Exploring the nearby ancient Mayan archaeological site of Caracol, I was shown the aforementioned wild coriander (*Eryngium foetidum*) and told about the

PHOTOS: ALAMY/IMAGE PROFESSIONALS GMBH; PAUL DEBOIS

Belize is the most densely forested country in Central America and the Caribbean

spiritual importance of the ceiba tree (*Ceiba pentandra*), which Mayans believed to be a sacred symbol of the universe, with roots in the underworld, trunk in the mortal world and whose branches reach to the heavens.

Travelling further south, I arrived in the sleepy seaside town of Punta Gorda. This is a less-visited part of the country, but richly rewarding for those who make the trip. The area is known for its huge wetland system, and I explored by boat with a capable guide who was expert at mimicking the call of many of the birds we saw wheeling overhead – ospreys, black hawks and snowy egrets, to name but a few. Birdwatchers flock to Belize, thanks to over 600 species of avian visitors and permanent residents. While cruising the cays it was just as important to look down, as we spotted manatees and a crocodile, before snorkelling from a tiny island to catch glimpses of turtles and – more alarmingly – barracudas. But no sharks on this occasion.

Away from the coast, the south offers even more wonderful flora and an opportunity for another highlight – a visit to a cacao plantation. It was wonderful to meet the farmers, Heraldo and Gloria, who grow cacao and other crops there, harvesting everything by hand, ready for export. Chocolate is an important part of the Belizean economy.

My trip came to an end in the more touristic but still laidback seaside town of Placencia. The peninsula is a sprawl of seaside resorts with a lively town at the tip. It's also a great base for further tours, either on land or at sea.

■ ESSENTIAL INFO

*Belize is a beautiful destination year-round and rarely below 16°C even in winter, but Jan-May is the dry season with sun and low humidity. My trip was organised by the Belize Tourism Board (**belizetourismboard.org**). For special places to stay, consider Sweet Songs Jungle Lodge (**sweetsongslodge.com**) and Mariposa Beach Resort (**mariposabeachresort.com**).*

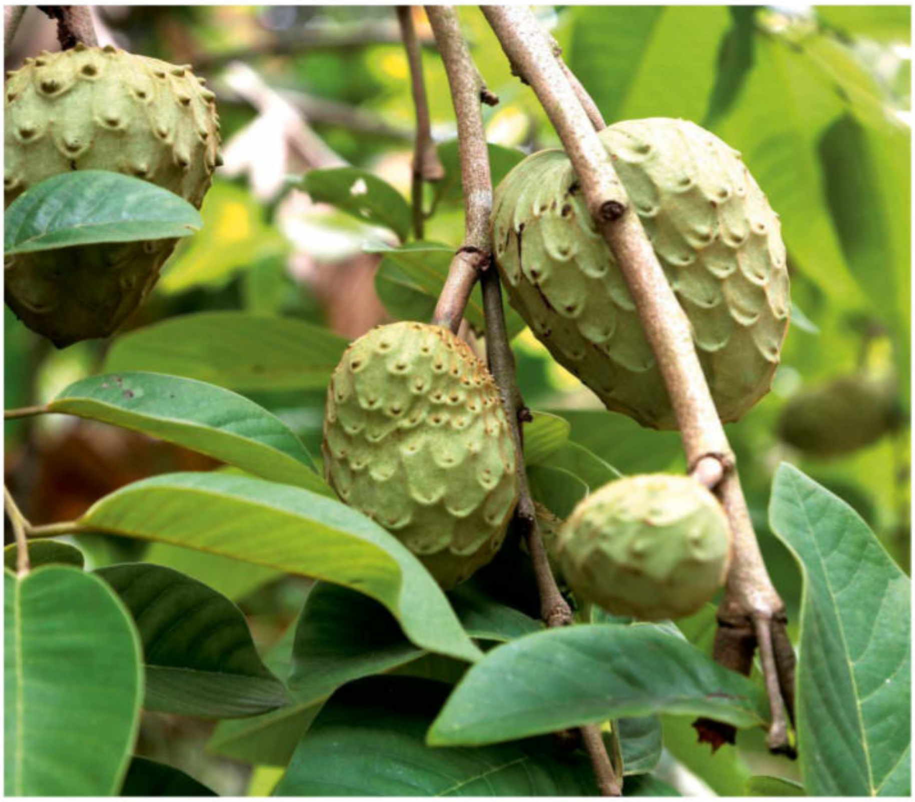
Inspired by Belize

Plants grow in total abundance in Belize, with exotic blooms and fruits to be found in every region. Here are some favourite finds you can try growing at home

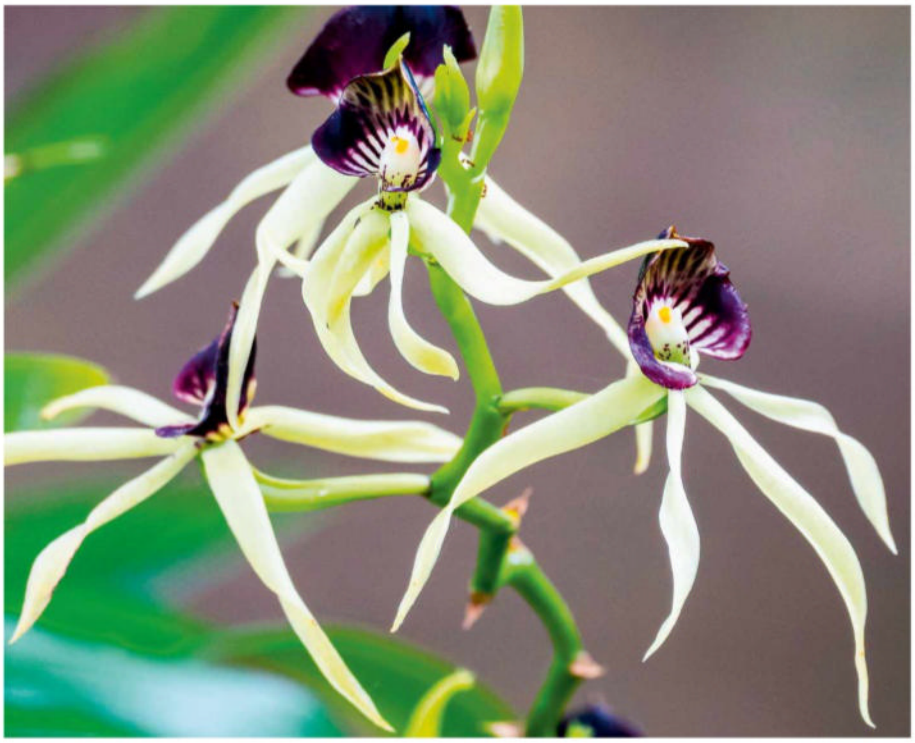
Chillies crop readily under cover in the UK

CHILLIES

Hot sauce is a kitchen staple in Belize and you're likely to encounter a bottle of Marie Sharp's Belizean Heat (a favourite brand in the country) on almost every restaurant table. Making your own chilli sauce is a lovely reward for nurturing your chilli plants through the summer. Try growing the variety 'Jamaican Hot' for an unmistakably fruity Caribbean punch of flavour or 'Aji Dulce' for a milder taste. I like to grow at least two of each plant so I get a good crop of fruits.



Custard apples may look unappetising from the outside, but they have delicious sweet flesh



The exquisite black orchid is Belize's national flower, one of around 300 native orchid species

EXOTIC FRUITS

I was lucky enough to try some of the wonderful fruit widely available in Belize – much of which I'd never even heard of before. Depending on the season you can enjoy sapodillas, which have a sweet flavour and granular texture, soursops, which are sweet and creamy and make a popular ice-cream flavour, or craboos, small sweet yellow fruits often used in a stew. I'm going to have a go at growing another popular fruit, the custard apple (*Annona cherimola*), from seed, but it will need frost protection.

ORCHIDS

Orchids have great cultural significance in Belize, and the black orchid is a symbol of national identity and pride. In the UK, the moth orchid or phalaenopsis has long been a popular house plant, but there are many other exotic orchids you could grow – see orchidbotanics.co.uk. You could also try our own native orchids, such as the heath spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) or common spotted orchid (*D. fuchsii*) – see britishorchids.co.uk for more details.

PHOTOS: ALAMY/GABBRO; GETTY/CREATIVE TOUCH IMAGING LTD/NURPHOTO; JASON INGRAM

NEXT MONTH Cat Mansley visits the mountainous playground of the Dolomites on a winter family holiday

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David Hurrion

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- **DAY 12 At sea** Your last cruising day, with a drinks party and farewell get-together.
- **DAY 13 London Tilbury** Early morning arrival. Time for breakfast and farewells before your journey home.

GARDEN HIGHLIGHTS

- **Gothenburg Botanical Garden**
- **The Garden Society of Gothenburg**
- **Frederiksborg Castle Gardens**
- **Eutin Palace & Gardens**
- **Oliwski Park and Olivia Garden**

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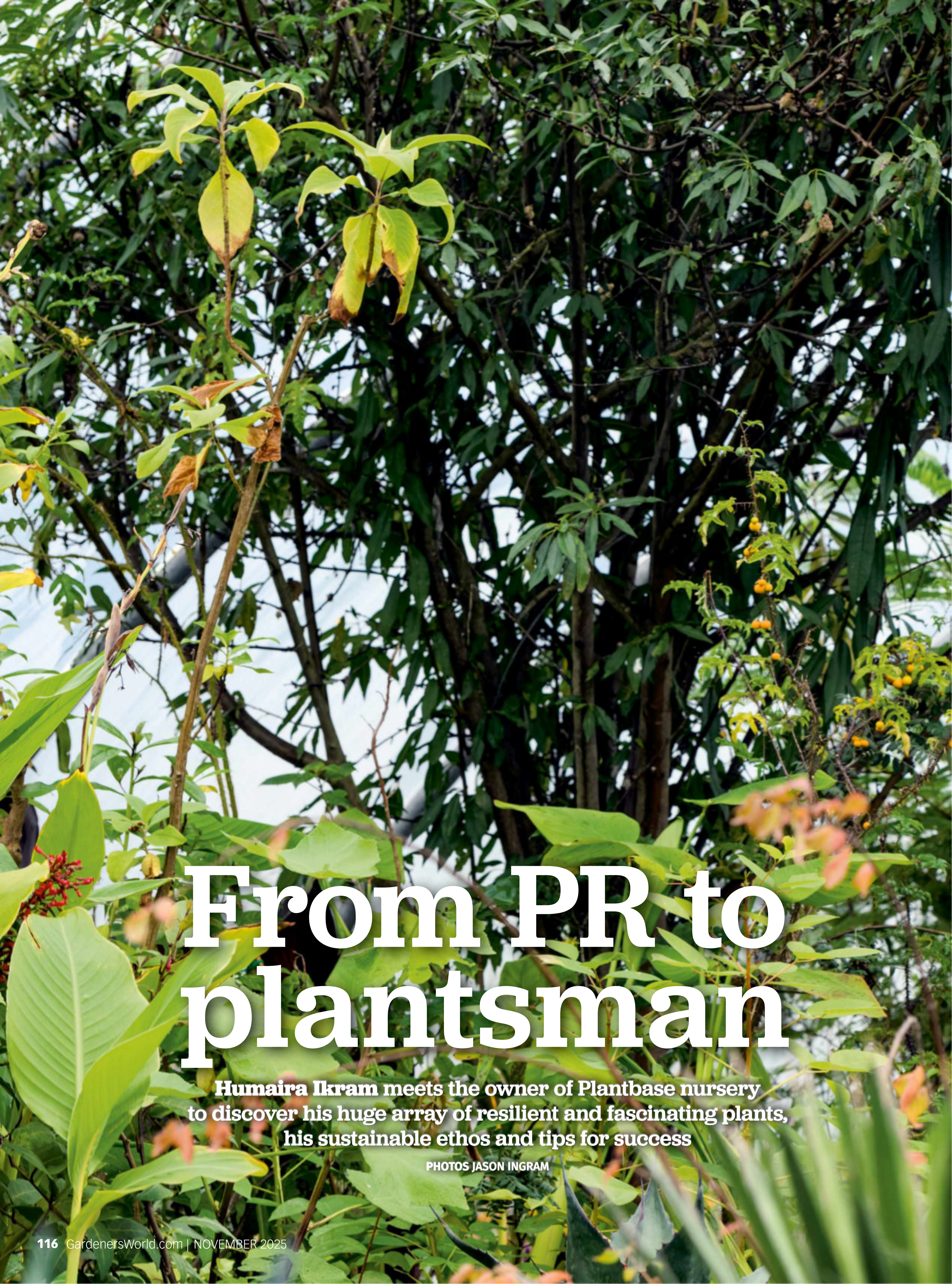


From PR to plantsman

Humaira Ikram meets the owner of Plantbase nursery to discover his huge array of resilient and fascinating plants, his sustainable ethos and tips for success

PHOTOS JASON INGRAM

Graham Blunt focuses on raising resilient, reliable plants for a wide range of growing conditions

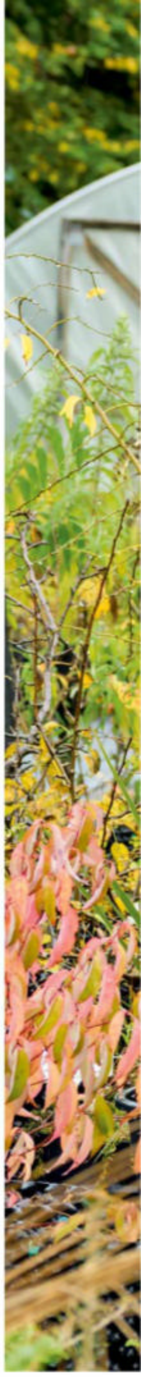
While Graham Blunt of Plantbase is passionate about plants and the environment, he regularly reveals glimpses of the PR and marketing man he used to be in the 1990s. He loves taking his plants to specialist plant fairs (16 of them in 2025) and wears his signature outfit of camo trousers, dress shirt, bow tie and cummerbund to get the attention of customers.

But don't let his outfit fool you into thinking he is less than serious about his work, including his commitment to minimising his environmental footprint. On the three-acre site of Plantbase nursery, Graham and his partner Jane built their home and offices from scratch, designing the site for energy efficiency, with solar panels for off-grid living. The six-year project saw them living in a caravan through both glorious summers and cold, wet winters.

Graham's journey to environmental consciousness began in his youth when his family moved to Brazil. At just 12 years old, he witnessed devastation in the Amazon rainforest, which profoundly shaped his ethos for his own nursery and his commitment to the environmental stewardship of his own land.

The north-facing, open site in Kent is on clay but Graham doesn't plant into the soil, instead using pots (often Air-Pots) for each plant. Air-Pots have dimpled sides full of holes, which exposes the roots to air. When the roots reach the edges, they're 'air pruned' and stop growing, rather than circling around inside the pot. The effect is that the roots fill the pots effectively without getting pot-bound. Graham's policy is to plant straight into a large-sized pot rather than potting

WATERSIDE
Plants for boggy areas & water margins



ABOVE Choose your plants to suit your growing conditions, whether that's a waterside site or shady woodland **LEFT** Many of the plants are grown in dimpled Air-Pots, which promote a healthy root system **BELOW** Plants that aren't fully hardy are brought into the polytunnels before temperatures drop **RIGHT** Graham gets to know each variety individually, grouping plants together that like similar conditions

Expert growing tips: tough plants

Choose the right plants to suit your conditions, then give them a good start plus some occasional upkeep if needed.

- **Do your research** before you buy if you want plants that will cope with specific tricky situations, such as damp soil, frost pockets or gardens visited by deer.

- **Consider all aspects** of your problem spot, including year-round temperatures, soil pH and varying amounts of shade.

- **Buy small plants** and let them grow to fill their position. They're cheaper and will adapt to the spot as needed.

- **Get the planting depth right** by copying the nursery's planting depth – positioning plants too deeply or too shallowly may hinder growth or kill them.

- **Even tough plants need looking after** initially – in particular, don't neglect watering during the first year, to help them settle in successfully.

- **Look after new growth**, as this can be vulnerable to pests such as slugs and aphids even if older growth is very tough. Protect with barriers and pick off or squash any pests promptly.

- **Control vigorous growth if necessary**, as some tough plants can also be thuggish. Check regularly and reduce the colony if too big. For plants that run, insert a barrier of polypropylene vertically into the soil.

on several times, which saves on plastic and compost use.

On his small site Graham grows over 2,200 plant varieties and has made a point of getting to know each one. "I grow these plants because I'm a bit nerdy and I like a collection. Most of the time I grow plants just because I like them and not because they're going to sell," he says. The collection is eclectic – Graham loves plants of all types and thoroughly enjoys sharing his knowledge at the shows and fairs he visits.

Graham's plants are resilient – he aims never to water excessively or give them too much warmth. In winter, those that aren't fully hardy are protected in polytunnels. He makes a point of understanding each plant's individual hardiness needs and bringing them in at the right time. "We try to make our plants tough first and pretty second." This is a big task, as many of his plants are usually classed as house plants. Graham does have a small team of people who help him run the nursery, but much of the time he's working alone and says this has made him efficient and focused.

The year divides into two, with winter being for site maintenance, ordering supplies and admin, including website updates. Most of his propagation is done in the warmer months, with attention to each variety's needs. This is also when Graham goes out to sell at fairs, which he loves, although he sells online too and welcomes purchasing visitors to his nursery site.

We visited Graham's nursery near Tunbridge Wells on a rainy October day, but despite the grey skies his warmth and his enthusiasm for his work shone out as he walked us through the rows and rows of interesting plants. □

Expert growing tips: succulents

Graham offers a wide range of succulent varieties, mainly for growing as house plants. They just need a few key conditions to thrive.

- **Although some succulents are hardier** than we might think, it's safest to keep most of them indoors except on the warmest summer days.
- **Plant in potting compost with good drainage**, such as a cactus mix or make your own using horticultural sand and peat-free potting compost.
- **Position succulents in bright light**, but protect green plants from very strong sunlight.
- **Water generously in summer**, allowing the potting compost to dry out between waterings.
- **In winter**, when most succulents are dormant, ease off watering to once every two or three weeks.
- **Look out for pests** such as mealybugs. These fluffy white insects love to hide in the crevices of succulents and thrive all year round indoors – if you have an infestation, try the biocontrol *Cryptolaemus*.
- **If keeping succulents outside** in summer, protect them from heavy rain and make sure they're not sitting in a tray of water.
- **Avoid bringing slugs and snails** in with your plants at the end of summer – check the plants, pots and compost.

Plantbase specialities

TOP 3 TOUGH PLANTS

Add colour and interest to tricky sites with these robust yet attractive choices:

❶ ***Potentilla fruticosa***
Extraordinarily resilient, this shrub is hardy down to -20°C, flowers prolifically from spring through to autumn and grows in any soil with sufficient moisture.
Height x Spread 120cm x 120cm
Flowers Apr-Oct

❷ ***Callistemon citrinus***
Perfect for gardens that deer or rabbits visit, this shrub produces bright red flower spikes at the shoot tips in summer, inspiring its common name of bottlebrush. Grow it in a sheltered spot or movable container. The leaves are lemon-scented when crushed.
H x S 6m x 3m **F** May-Aug

❸ ***Gunnera magellanica***
Known as baby gunnera or dwarf rhubarb, this is a very different species from its giant relations. It makes useful ground cover for damp, shaded areas of the garden, forming an attractive mat of glossy, rounded leaves.
H x S 10cm x 30cm **F** Jun-Aug

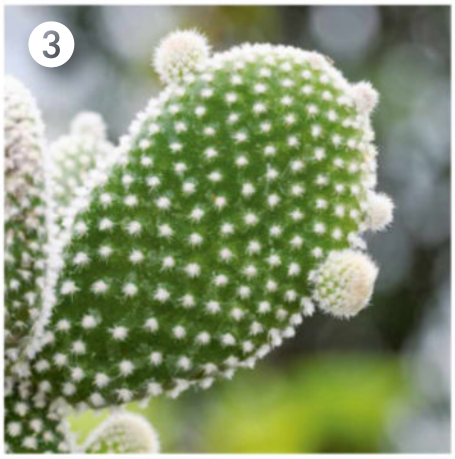
TOP 3 SUCCULENTS

Ideal for anyone who occasionally forgets to water, these house plants rely on their reserves of moisture to see them through:

❶ ***Haworthiopsis attenuata***
Known as the zebra plant due to its bold white markings, this South African succulent makes a striking house plant. Stems bearing tubular white flowers appear in summer.
H x S 30cm x 10cm **F** July-Aug

❷ ***Parodia magnifica***
This small ball-shaped cactus has bands of bristly golden spines that elegantly circle its body, but take care not to touch them! It may also produce yellow flowers in summer.
H x S 15cm x 15cm **F** Jul-Aug

❸ ***Opuntia microdasys* 'Albata'**
This is a cactus with personality, its flattened pads giving it the common name of bunny ears. New plants can easily be propagated by removing and planting the 'ears'.
H x S 70cm x 30cm **F** May-Aug



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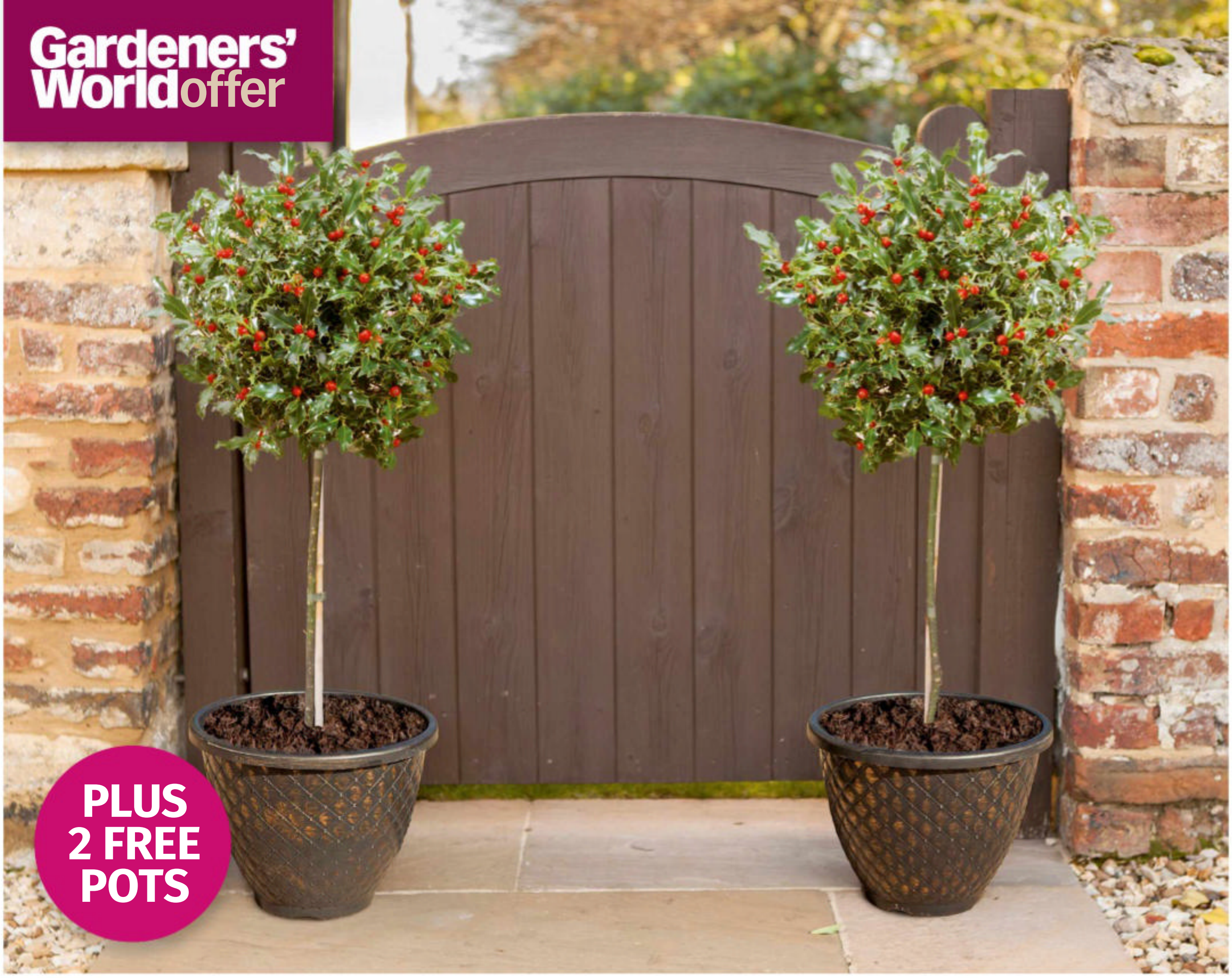

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Today's top 3

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November
Growing guide

You can sow a wide range of crops this month for harvests into autumn and winter

Sow indoors 🟪 **Plant/sow outdoors** 🟩 **Harvest** 🟧

Key crops for November	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
Apples Rich in protective polyphenols, eating an apple a day may reduce the risk of certain cancers and developing type 2 diabetes.	🟩	🟩	🟩							🟩	🟩	🟩	**Tips** Most apples are self-infertile, so to crop well they need another tree from the same pollination group growing nearby. **Plant** ↓ level with soil mark on stem **Final spacing** ↔ 1.5m apart ⤢ 5m between rows
								🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧		
Blackberries Anthocyanins give these berries their colour and protective properties that may help to combat age-related illnesses.	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩					🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	**Tips** Blackberries need support in their first summer, so put this in place before planting. Choose a thornless variety for easy picking. **Plant** ↓ 5cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 2.5-4m apart ⤢ 2.5-4m between rows
							🟧	🟧	🟧				
Blackcurrants These berries have 30 times more vitamin C and 40 per cent more protective polyphenols than blueberries.	🟩	🟩	🟩							🟩	🟩	🟩	**Tips** Blackcurrants grow well in pots and can then be protected from cold winds during flowering. **Plant** ↓ 5cm lower than soil mark on stem **Final spacing** ↔ 1.5m apart ⤢ 1.2m between rows
						🟧	🟧	🟧					
Broad beans Rich in antioxidants, eat them regularly to support your immune system and boost your mood. Make into hummus or pesto.		🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩					🟩	🟩		**Tips** Broad beans have a long tap root, so loosen any compacted soil with a fork before sowing to help plants get deeply rooted in. **Sow** ↓ 5cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 20cm apart ⤢ 45cm between rows
					🟧	🟧	🟧						
Gooseberries Offering heart-healthy potassium, fibre and vitamin C, eating these berries will help lower the risk of heart disease.	🟩	🟩	🟩							🟩	🟩	🟩	**Tips** Gooseberries like free-draining soil, so dig in well-rotted manure before planting to improve the soil's structure. **Plant** ↓ level with soil mark on stem **Final spacing** ↔ 1.5m apart ⤢ 1.5m between rows
						🟧	🟧	🟧					
Onions Full of healthy compounds, including flavonoids, tannins and allicin, which have anti-bacterial and antioxidant properties.	🟪	🟪	🟩	🟩					🟩	🟩	🟩	🟪	**Tips** Growing from sets (young bulbs) is easier than seeds. Choose a new site each year to keep plants healthy. **Plant** ↓ sets with tip showing **Sow** ↓ 2cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 10cm apart ⤢ 30cm between rows
							🟧	🟧	🟧				
Plums These supply twice the protective compounds of peaches. Eat with skins intact to optimise intake.	🟩	🟩	🟩							🟩	🟩	🟩	**Tips** Plum trees fare best in a warm, sunny position – against a south-facing wall would be the ideal spot. **Plant** ↓ level with soil mark on stem **Final spacing** ↔ 3-4m apart ⤢ 5m between rows
								🟧	🟧				
Raspberries These are one of the best food sources of ellagic acid, a plant compound with promising anti-cancer properties.	🟩	🟩	🟩								🟩	🟩	**Tips** Cut all the stems of autumn-fruiting raspberries right down to the ground during late winter. **Plant** ↓ level with soil mark on stem **Final spacing** ↔ 45cm apart ⤢ 1.8m between rows
						🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧			
Redcurrants Lower in calories than blackcurrants, redcurrants are a useful source of vitamins C and K, and potassium.	🟩	🟩	🟩								🟩	🟩	**Tips** When pruning, always cut to a healthy bud to promote quick healing, as redcurrants are prone to botrytis. **Plant** ↓ level with soil mark on stem **Final spacing** ↔ 1.5m apart ⤢ 1.8m between rows
						🟧	🟧	🟧					
Salad leaves These are a great source of nutrition, particularly bone-friendly magnesium, calcium and phosphorus.	🟪	🟪	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟩	🟪	🟪	🟪	**Tips** Sow indoors from now to February – sow thinly, water sparingly and keep seedlings well ventilated to prevent damping off disease. **Sow** ↓ 1cm deep **Final spacing** ↔ 15cm apart ⤢ 35cm between rows
	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	🟧	

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Gardeners' Question Time

Our experts tackle your queries, including coping with drought on a clay garden, distorted grapes and corn cobs, plus reining in horsetail

Ashley Edwards
A head gardener with Crocus at Dorney Court, Ashley also gardens oncreen with *DIY SOS* and *GW* TV.

Anne Swithinbank
A keen fruit, vegetable and house-plant grower, Anne was formerly the glasshouse supervisor at RHS Garden Wisley

Bob Flowerdew
Bob is an organic gardener and a radio presenter, as well as the author of dozens of gardening books

Q Perfumed plants don't seem to give out much scent in my garden – why?

DE Bastin, Hertfordshire

A ASHLEY SAYS Floral scent is created by many different volatiles and is highly sensitive to environmental changes. A 2022 University of Cambridge study* showed that prolonged periods of drought had an effect on plant volatiles and, as a result, floral scent. It could be that your clay soil is drying out in summer, causing the plants stress and changing the complicated range of chemicals that produce scent.

Try improving your soil's moisture retention by increasing the amount of organic matter, ideally adding a mulch of garden compost to the surface in autumn/spring. Alternatively, keep your scented plants in pots so you have more control over soil conditions and feed them with a balanced organic fertiliser. Situate the pots close to entrances and windows to get the full effect. Scented plants like lavender are known to have a positive effect on our wellbeing as well as attracting pollinators.

Q&A TEAM ANSWER
Scented plants

Position lavender where you brush past to release its scent

Daphne 'Aureomarginata' is at its fragrant best Jan-Mar

A ANNE SAYS Flower scents are complex, often capricious, aromas influenced by weather, timing and the maturity of individual blooms. Produced to entice pollinating insects, some blooms, such as roses, are more scented in the warmth of the day, while moth-pollinated honeysuckles and tobacco plants release fragrance at night.

To detect scents, our noses have to be in good working order. Inhaled molecules reach a sensory area behind the bridge of the nose, stimulating millions of nerve endings that send messages to the front of the brain. This process is easily hampered by inflammation or damage to nerve endings after viral infections. Some plants (Chinese witch hazel, *Daphne odora*, wisteria) waft out carrying perfumes, while others (dianthus, bearded iris) keep them close.

Trachelospermum is most fragrant in a sheltered spot at dusk. Heat and dryness can affect the volatile oils produced and how they react with each other, so last summer's drought may be to blame for weak scent.

Q Why did my tiny strawberries die?

Malcolm Draper, Hertfordshire

A BOB SAYS This strongly indicates serious water stress. Could your strawberries be over-crowded? For good crops over several harvests, plants need to be at least 50cm apart. The problem could be from roots eaten by vine weevils or rot, so check by pulling hard; if they come up you'll see any damage.

But I suspect it's simple drought. Strawberries are very thirsty crops so they probably needed much more water through our unexpectedly dry periods. However, more importantly, your patch has not cropped for two years, so the plant must be at least three years old and should be replaced as strawberries peter out very rapidly. Buy yourself some new plants and start a new bed.

Replace strawberry plants over three years old to get good crops

PHOTOS: PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/DIGIPUB, MTREASURE, PFMPHOTOSTOCK; JASON INGRAM

*BIT.LY/DROUGHT-SCENT

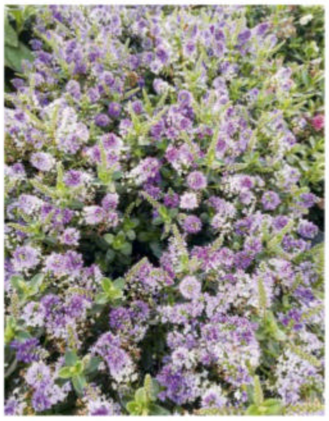
Q What is the best way to look after my new *Veronica* x *andersonii*?

Charlotte Roden, by email

A **ASHLEY SAYS** Also called hebe, this veronica attracts plenty of bees and butterflies. It has narrow, evergreen leaves on dark-purple stems and purple flower spikes that fade to white.

This shrub is a tough plant and will grow on most soils as long as they are free-draining and preferably neutral to alkaline. It enjoys full sun for the best display of flowers but will also grow in semi shade. It gets large, with an eventual height and spread of around 2m.

Incorporate organic garden compost into the ground before planting and water well. Keep it well watered until it has established and during dry spells. To keep your hebe looking bushy, prune lightly in early spring before new growth begins and deadhead the flowers.



Plant hebes in full sun for lots of blooms that pollinators love

Q How can I get a good crop from mini sweetcorn?

Richard Woodage, Berkshire

A **ANNE SAYS** Although only five to six mini cobs are produced per plant, home-grown baby sweetcorn has superior flavour to shop-bought. All sweetcorn should be set in blocks, not rows, for successful wind pollination but position mini ones closer together.

Ditch the nitrogen-rich chicken manure that you have used, give the bed a mulch now and, next year, stick to seaweed fertiliser.

***Vinca major* 'Variegata' is an attractive ground-cover plant**

Q How can my clay garden cope with drought?

Elisabeth Hopson, Hampshire

A **ASHLEY SAYS** A healthy soil will support plants and retain moisture. Add plenty of organic matter to your borders annually. This will be incorporated by worms and other invertebrates over time, creating channels in the soil thus allowing water to penetrate and reach plant roots.

The more bare soil you cover the less water will evaporate. Try ground-cover plants such as *Epimedium* x *versicolor* 'Sulphureum', *Vinca major* 'Variegata' and *Galium odoratum*; shrubs like *Fatsia polycarpa* Green Fingers, *Danae racemosa* and *Sarcococca hookeriana*; and ferns such as Asplenium, Dryopteris and Polystichum. Plant in autumn so they have time to establish during the cooler, wetter months.

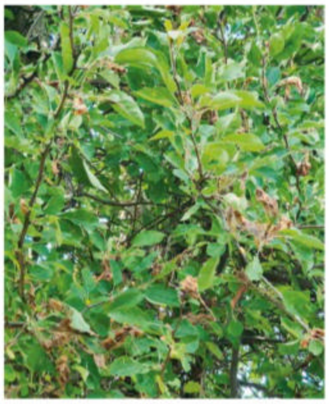
Q Why did our orange drop leaves when we brought it inside?

Leigh and Lucy Davies, by email

A **ANNE SAYS** Your picture shows a standard-trained orange tree in a small square container. Plants on standing areas often put out a mat of feeding roots into the moist area beneath the pot. When the pot is moved, these are damaged and this could contribute to leaf loss. Prior to this, there might have been prolonged rain and cold nights and, if the conservatory is south-facing, overheating after.

Allow the plant to adjust indoors by ensuring there is adequate daytime ventilation unless the weather is cold or windy. Let the compost surface begin to dry out between waterings, use rainwater if possible and winter citrus feed as recommended. In spring, wait for signs of growth before removing the pot. If the rootball looks healthy, pot on to a larger one using a citrus plant compost or a 50:50 mix of John Innes No.2 and ericaceous compost with 20 per cent potting grit.

Orange trees need time to adjust when moved indoors



Pick off ermine moth larvae or leave them to the birds

Q What happened to our apple tree and how can we best deal with it?

Daksha Patel, by email

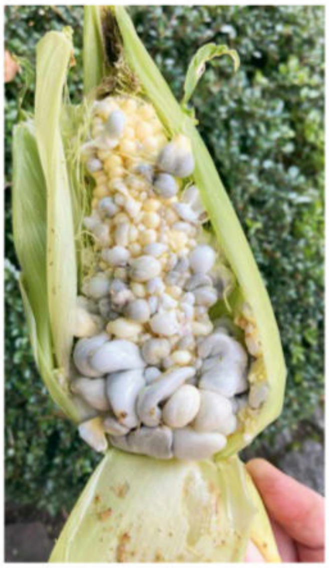
A **ANNE SAYS** The dead leaves in your picture look rolled and webbed together, so caterpillars are the likely suspects. This could be the work of ermine moth larvae, feeding together in a cave of webbed leaves. These will now be overwintering as small caterpillars on the bark. Encourage birds to feed on them.

Q How did my sweetcorn cobs become so malformed last summer?

Rosie Lieberman,
Leipzig, Germany

A **BOB SAYS** This is the work of the fungal disease, maize smut. The corn's grains have become swollen bladders filled with black powder, the spores of which have then spread onto leaves and other plants.

Highly infectious, it's important to burn any cobs and affected plants as soon as possible to prevent the spores from spreading and infesting the soil.



Burn cobs infected by maize smut as soon as possible

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Soil acidity can affect the colour of hydrangeas

Q My hydrangea has blue and pink blooms – why?

Philip Walker, by email

A ANNE SAYS I reckon your mop-headed hydrangea started out as a pink cultivar but due to the acidity of your soil, it veers towards blue. Acidic soils make aluminium more available to plants, which helps turn the petals blue. In alkaline soil, hydrangeas with blue flowers turn pink.

A simple pH level test might explain flower colour changes

Q Why did some of my flowers change colour this year?

Pia, Kent

A ASHLEY SAYS Colour change in flowers often happens due to a pH change in the soil. This can be caused by a number of factors including rainfall or the type of mulch used on borders. Also, plants like digitalis and lychnis can revert back to white after a few years and even generations.

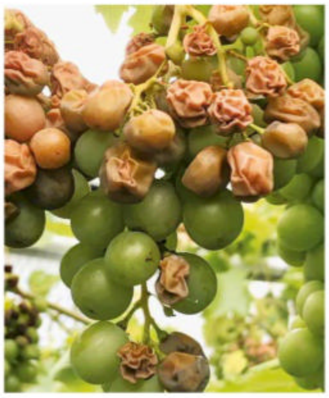
Q What happened to my grapes?

Alex Nicolson, Renfrewshire

A BOB SAYS Luckily there are no indications of mould nor mildew on your greenhouse-grown Black Hamburg grapes though, having been damaged, many berries would have rotted so they'll need to be removed.

Your photo shows the berries that are most damaged are exposed, whereas others under and behind these have escaped damage. This is 'scald', which is caused by an unexpectedly hot sun, probably combined with insufficient ventilation. It could just be that something that was shading them has been removed, resulting in sudden overheating, though increasingly hotter sunny periods are more likely to blame.

Fit another roof vent opening, ideally with another side one as well. And if you don't have automatic roof vent openers, try to get at least one.



Intense sunlight and heat can damage greenhouse fruit

Weed-suppressing membranes should be used temporarily

Q Should I remove the weed-suppressing membrane in my new garden?

Sarah Butcher, Kent

A BOB SAYS Geotextiles should be used for weed suppression and then be removed. If these are left in place for too long then weeds will soon grow through and establish from every hole! This effectively locks the geotextile in place, making it awkward to remove. And, as you suspect, most of these membranes are plastic, thus they will slowly degrade and pollute, so should not be left on the ground.

First, remove any bulky top growth with a scythe, trimmer or secateurs. Then, starting from a corner, lift the membrane back and up to slice through roots with a sharp knife, and just keep going. This is much easier with one person pulling, one slicing.

Q&A
HOT TOPIC
Weed control

Q How can we keep an area of block paving weed-free?

Eira Steggles, Monmouth

A ANNE SAYS Our driveway has not been treated with weedkiller for 20 years and, as we encourage thymes, wild strawberries and *Verbena bonariensis*,it can look messy. Yet it remains a firm surface for cars, presents no danger to wildlife, is a home for invertebrates and there is no runoff of weedkillers towards the kitchen garden. Luckily, our driveway is private and I can understand that a weedy shared area for elderly residents like yours might be viewed differently. Persistent thick-rooted dandelions could dislodge blocks while leaves make a slippery layer.

There are contact weedkillers (which wither the top of the plant but are not translocated to the roots) based on pelargonic acid or vinegar (as well as plenty of homemade remedies) but presumably they could also run off and potentially acidify soil further away. Try paying someone with younger knees and hips to hand weed regularly, or have the area repointed to fill the gaps between your paving blocks.

Regular attention will help you keep on top of persistent weeds

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; JASON INGRAM

Q&A gardeners' question time

Q How should I prune my large fig tree?

Linda McLeod, London

A BOB SAYS Decide which older branches to keep or shorten that will give an attractive framework (temporarily chalk/whitewash these branches to help you with pruning later). In late winter/early spring, saw off unwanted large branches.

When the plant is in leaf again, start thinning, removing or reducing congesting shoots to stubs. Tackle a quarter of the tree at a time, a fortnight apart over two months to spread the shock. Pinch out the tips of new shoots once they have five leaves from early to midsummer. Each autumn, remove every fig larger than a pea.

Figs have irritant sap, so wear protective gloves and glasses.

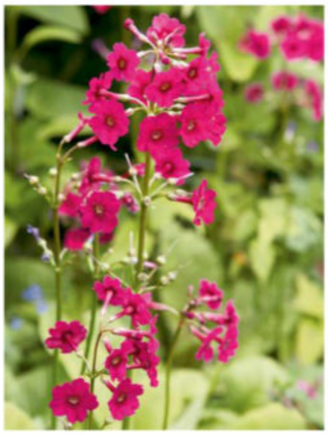
Correct pruning keeps figs productive and manageable

Q Why are our primulas flowering in autumn as well as in spring?

Bogdan Soponski, Derbyshire

A ASHLEY SAYS Candelabra primulas generally flower in spring/early summer. The fact that yours are flowering in November could be a sign of a mild winter, confusing your plants into thinking that it's spring again!

Climate change is affecting plant flowering times and can impact overall plant health.



Candelabra primulas usually flower just once a year

Q Help! Mare's tail is taking over after I let the garden go wilder last year

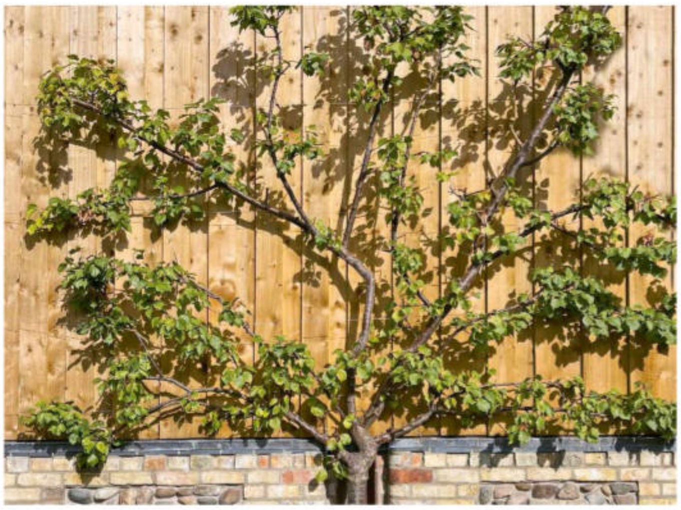
Anne Weston, by email

A ASHLEY SAYS A UK native plant, Mare's tail, horsetail or *Equisetum* grows from rhizomes as deep as 2m, so digging out and removing the soil won't solve your problem and may make it worse by propagating the rhizomes in the process.

Pull up the shoots in late spring and again in late summer to weaken it. Doing this routinely over a few years will keep it in check. If it's growing in a grassy area, keep mowing the site to eventually weaken and kill it. If it is in borders, cover with cardboard and mulch heavily, and pull shoots that appear.

Also try planting woody shrubs among the horsetail, as the shade will weaken it. If it's contained to a wild corner of your garden you can let it run, as it looks quite attractive en masse, and provides food and habitat for many UK insects.

***Equisetum* needs regular attention to control its spread**



Fan-trained or as a tree, apricots grow well in a sunny spot

Q How can we get better fruit on our apricot?

Lesley Gilby, by email

A ANNE SAYS Cultivars such as Flavorcot and 'Tomcot' do well in our climate and this has been a fruitful year. In a sheltered, sunny spot and given a good root run, apricots make small trees but are often fan-trained against a wall or fence. This makes it easier to protect blossom from frost damage, hand pollinate flowers, and then thin and pick the fruit. Yours may have grown too large for fan-training but you can still hand pollinate by gently wafting a feather duster over the flowers.

In spring, treat your plant to a mulch of well-rotted garden compost over the roots. If fruits are reachable, thin when cherry-sized, leaving them 5-8cm apart. Pruning should take place only in spring or summer to prevent infection by silver-leaf disease. Aim for a bush or pyramid shape, remove weak or crossing stems and thin to prevent overcrowding.

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PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/PILESASMILES

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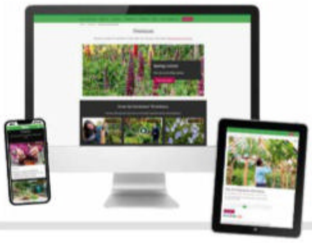

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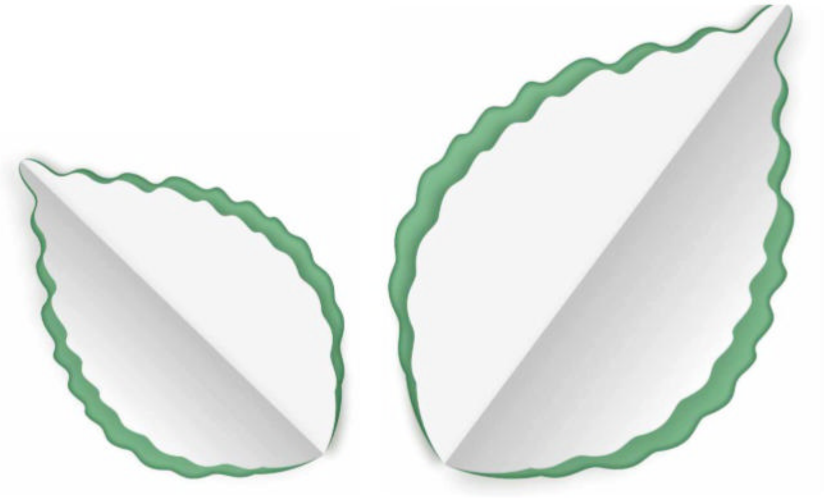

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European Forests: EU27 + Norway, Switzerland and the UK

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Christmas puzzles

Take a break from the garden with these festive brainteasers

Food for thought

Unscramble the anagrams below to reveal six seasonal edibles. You are looking for: a nut, a spice, a herb, a potato, a fruit, a Christmas pud ingredient

GREET NINA

AUNT SAL

MAN IN CON

STUN TECH

SORRY MAE

SEE RIDE

Step by step

By changing one letter each time to make a new word, can you transform HERB into DILL in five steps or less?

H E R B

_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

_ _ _ _

D I L L

Secret six

Use each letter in the grid once to answer the Christmas-related clues

G	N	R	E	A	N
E	O	I	G	R	S
I	B	D	N	I	R
K	A	Z	E	R	I
E	G	A	R	H	A
A	O	E	L	N	R

A citrus fruit

_ _ _ _ _ _ _

A fir

_ _ _ _ _ _ _

A nut

_ _ _ _ _ _ _

A spice

_ _ _ _ _ _ _

A mincemeat ingredient

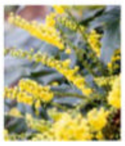
_ _ _ _ _ _ _

An evergreen genus

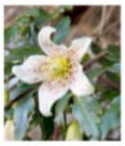
_ _ _ _ _ _ _

Winter wonders

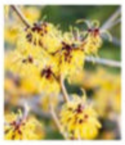
Pictured below are four winter-flowering plants, but their names have got a bit muddled. Can you match the genus and species to the correct photo?



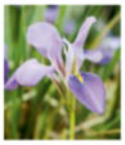
Hamamelis cirrhosa



Iris x media



Mahonia unguicularis



Clematis x intermedia

Fine dining

Can you find these ten items that contribute to Christmas feasts?

CARROT
CLOVE
CRANBERRY
DATE
FIG
NUTMEG
ONION
PARSNIP
POTATO
SAGE

I	G	E	F	T	O	R	R	A	C	A	N
C	P	A	T	O	N	I	C	R	Y	F	I
R	N	S	A	I	R	L	S	A	D	I	O
A	R	U	G	F	O	M	E	G	I	G	N
N	B	E	T	V	R	E	G	A	S	T	U
B	O	V	E	M	C	R	A	T	O	P	G
E	D	A	N	T	E	N	U	N	B	I	E
R	A	R	S	N	O	G	I	P	O	N	V
R	R	O	F	E	T	O	P	A	R	S	E
Y	S	I	T	I	N	S	I	N	U	R	G
R	R	A	G	P	O	T	A	T	O	A	N
E	D	F	I	R	A	R	S	N	T	P	B

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; PAUL DEBOIS; GETTY/ANDREYTTL; JASON INGRAM

Puzzle solutions over page ▶

Christmas crossword

Put down your secateurs, pick up a pen and exercise those brain muscles instead...

ACROSS

1 Indoor bloomer often given as a Christmas gift (9)

5 The fruits of __ *sylvestris* make colourful festive decorations (5)

8 '__ Flame', a dogwood with fiery winter stems (5)

9 Shrub whose black berries make a delicious syrup (5)

11 __ fir is an ideal Christmas tree (8)

14 Sweet palm fruit associated with the festive season (4)

15 *Camellia japonica* '__ Anniversary' blooms in mid-winter (6)

16 Deciduous native tree, also called *Ulmus glabra* (4,3)

18 __ *abies*, a traditional choice for the Christmas tree (5)

20 Tree whose dense needles are a great base for a wreath (3)

21 First early potato, good for boiling and roasting (4)

22 Wrinkled edible seed of the *Juglans* genus (6)

23 '__ Wonder' produces sweet early-maturing peas (8)

24 'Fruit' of a conifer, useful for seasonal decorations (4)

25 The __ root is the deep main root of a carrot, for example (3)

26 Crinkly type of cabbage, a nutritious winter staple (5)

DOWN

1 Edible oval nuts, a favourite in the Christmas nut bowl (7)

2 Holly variety named for its orange berries (5)

3 Citrus fruit that adds a tangy taste to mincemeat (5)

4 Herb traditionally used to make turkey stuffing (4)

5 Spice derived from nutmeg, ideal for sweet seasonal dishes (4)

6 Use this to make energy-giving fat cakes for birds in winter (4)

7 Another name for euphorbia (6)

10 *Pinus contorta*, or __ pine, is a long-lasting Christmas tree (9)

12 Dried, this fruit has many uses in seasonal cooking (7)

13 __ spruce is the common name for 18 across (6)

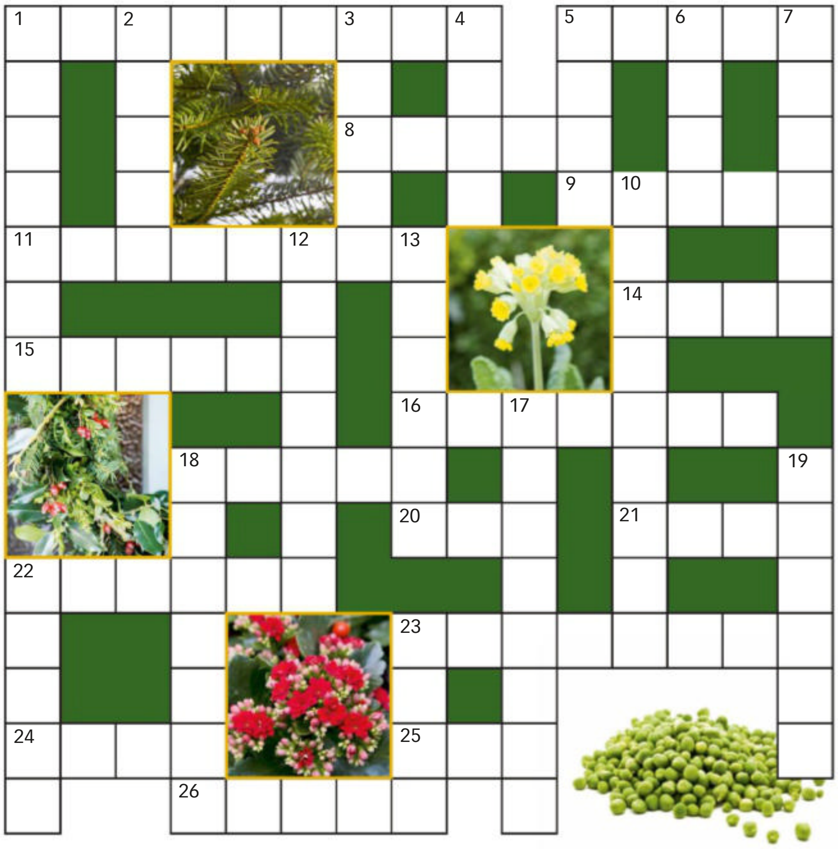
17 Pretty wild bloomers that appear in early spring (8)

18 Winter __ add cheery colour to pots and borders in the colder months (7)

19 Graceful snowdrop with an attractive name (6)

22 __ hazel bears bright, fragrant blooms in late winter (5)

23 Flaming __ , or Christmas kalanchoe, is a popular seasonal house plant (4)



CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

ACROSS

1 Amaryllis **5** Malus **8** Magic **9** Elder **11** Nordmann **14** Date **15** Silver **16** Wych elm **18** Picea **20** Yew **21** Orla **22** Walnut **23** Kelvedon **24** Cone **25** Tap **26** Savoy

DOWN

1 Almonds **2** Amber **3** Lemon **4** Sage **5** Mace **6** Lard **7** Spurge **10** Lodgepole **12** Apricot **13** Norway **17** Cowslips **18** Pansies **19** Magnet **22** Witch **23** Katy

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

Food for thought Tangerine, Sultana, Cinnamon, Chestnut, Rosemary, Desiree

Step by step There are several possible solutions, including: **herb** herd held hell hill **dill**

Winter wonders *Hamamelis x intermedia, Iris unguicularis, Mahonia x media, Clematis cirrhosa*

Secret six Orange, Korean, Brazil, Ginger, Raisin, Hedera

CROSSWORD AND PUZZLES COMPILED BY NICOLA TR
PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; GETTY/GAFFERA; JASON INGRAM

Gardeners' World magazine

Issue number 416

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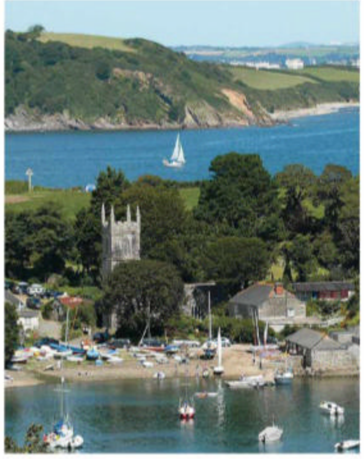

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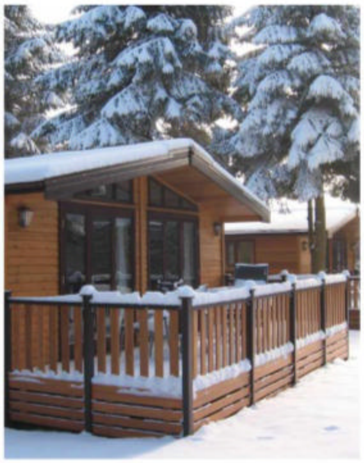

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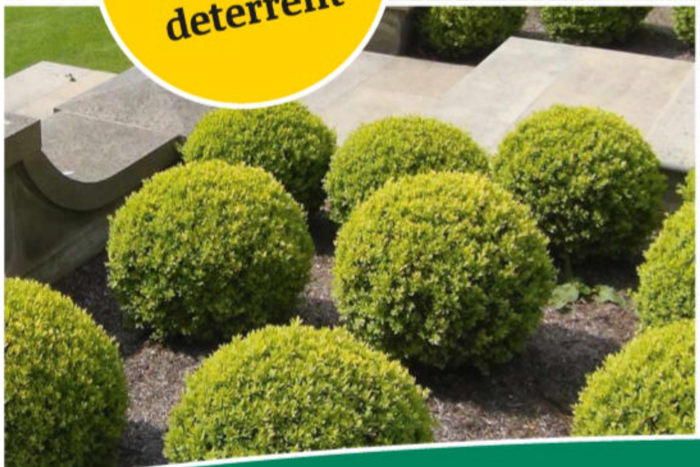

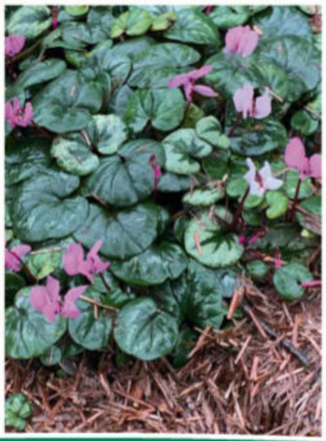

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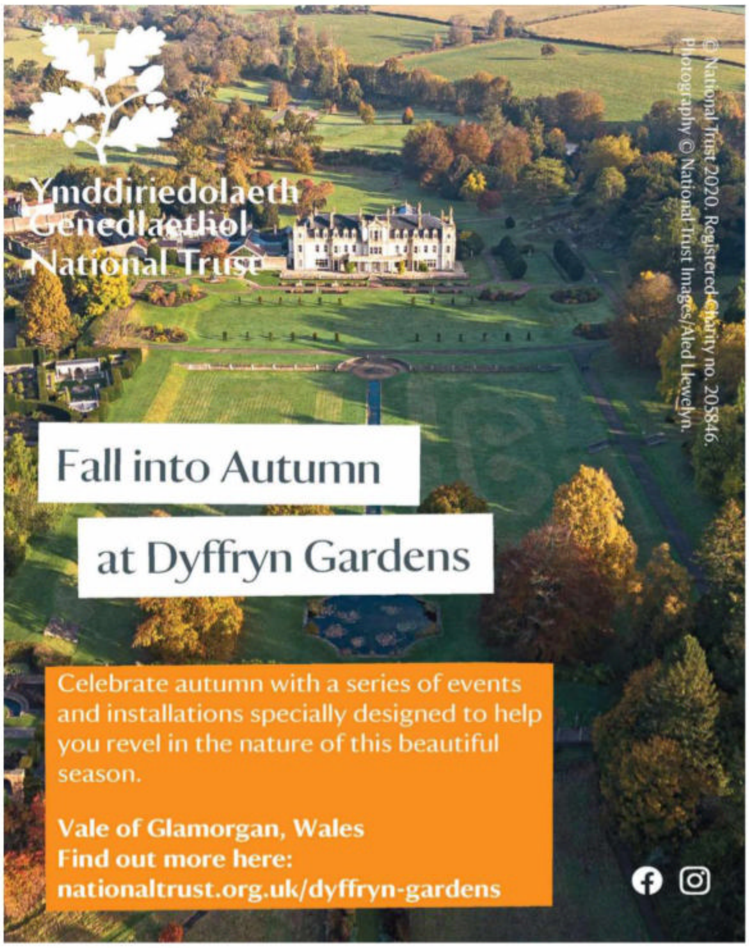

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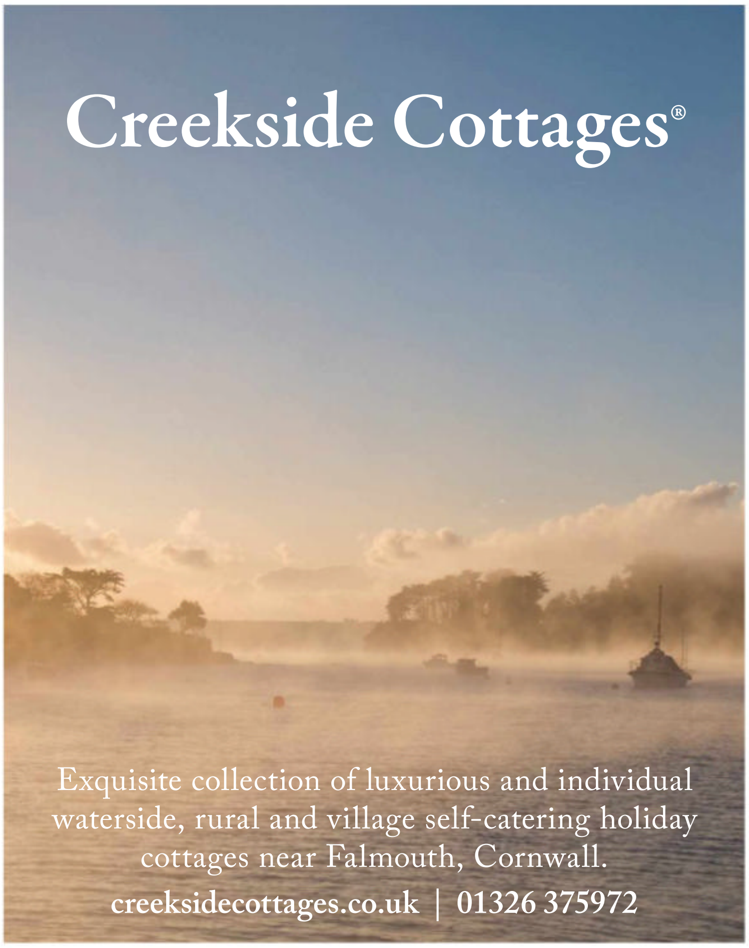

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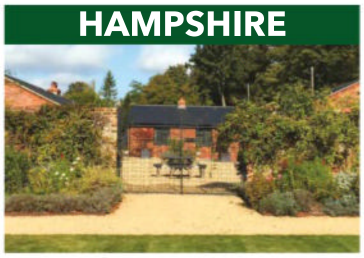

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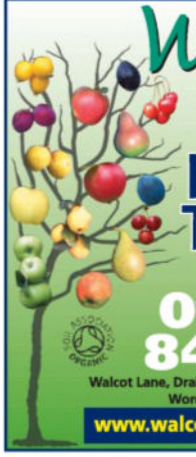

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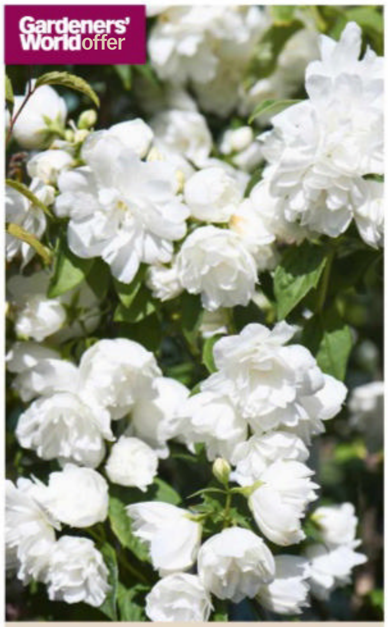

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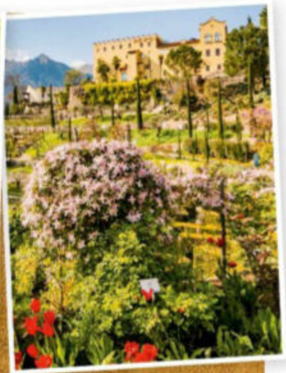

Garden globetrotting goes to the Dolomites

PLUS ■ Winter redesign ■ We love wildlife and containers ■ More than 50 things to do now ■ Fun Christmas puzzles

PHOTOS: SARAH CUTTLE; GETTY/NIGEL HARRIS; NEIL HEPWORTH; JASON INGRAM

Tales from Titchmarsh

To enjoy the full benefits that gardening can have on our mental health, maybe it's time to be a bit more self-indulgent, says **Alan**

How about a little 'me' time?
I know, it smacks of selfishness whenever we dare to undertake something purely for our own pleasure, but as gardeners I think we've earned our moments of self-indulgence. After all, just about every activity that any responsible gardener undertakes out there on that plot of ground – apart from growing food – is carried out for the benefit of nature, wildlife, the greening of the Earth and the good of the planet. It's a noble intention.

But just for a little while, let's assume that your care for all other forms of life on your tiny patch of the planet is a given and you can take time to indulge yourself. What is it that gives you pleasure on a purely personal level? Of course, you might find it's impossible to separate the two things – the pleasure comes from the good you're doing and also the beautiful picture you're creating. The thing is, the two need not be mutually exclusive.

> “Neatness is often frowned on in a garden, but when it improves the view and gives you pleasure – all without compromising nature – then revel in it”

Take the striped lawn. Do those parallel swathes of light green and dark green give you a frisson of joy? I freely confess that gazing on their symmetry, framed by a formal stone terrace, fills me with delight. There will be those who regard such niceties as irresponsible, of no benefit to insects and other forms of wildlife, which would be much better served by 'no mow May'. Pah! What about June and July?

If you stop mowing simply for a month, you've lulled the insect life into a false sense of security. Come June, you'll demolish their sanctuary and what good is that? It's far, far better to have a patch of grass that you leave unmown between April and September and have alongside it an area of striped lawn that pleases your sensibilities as well as providing a feeding ground for blackbirds, thrushes, starlings and robins who find that long grass makes foraging for worms and grubs all but impossible. What the mown grass also does is act as a frame to show off the area of meadow – the contrast between the two is pleasing. Selfish? Not really. With such an arrangement, the insects, the birds – and I – can all be happy.

You see, it's all very well to talk about gardening being good for mental health, but there is no reason why that should simply be a by-product – it can be a goal in itself. Neatness is often frowned on in a garden, but when such care and attention improves the view and, simultaneously, gives you a rising tide of pleasure – all without compromising nature – then revel in it. Yes, single flowers are best for supporting pollinators, but let's be honest, you can also enjoy fully double hybrid tea roses and dahlias without risking Armageddon.

There are some tasks that many would regard as drudgery: weeding, deadheading or sweeping the patio. I am probably a simpleton at heart, but provided I'm not tackling a bed overrun with ground elder or couch grass, I rather enjoy bringing order out of chaos – pulling out half a dozen strands of convolvulus or uprooting a patch of groundsel and leaving clean earth in my wake. I even enjoy sweeping a terrace or patio, knowing that when I've finished and turn round to look at a job well done, I'll get a basic kind of pleasure from the transformation. Likewise, deadheading not only encourages many plants to produce a new flush of flowers, it also refreshes their appearance, which makes me feel good.

You may regard these tasks as dreary, but there is much to be said for those jobs in the garden that require little intelligent input, simply dogged application. The mind can switch off for a while and attention paid solely to the task in hand. Simple pleasures.

Ironically, it seems to me that the selfish gardener, who at heart espouses a love of the land and all the creatures that rely on it for shelter and sustenance, can really enjoy the best of all worlds. Beauty and order need not mean sterility.

Only if we love what we do and indulge ourselves with predilections that are harmless to other forms of life can we really get the most out of gardening. So get out there and make the most of your 'me' time.

Alan.

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